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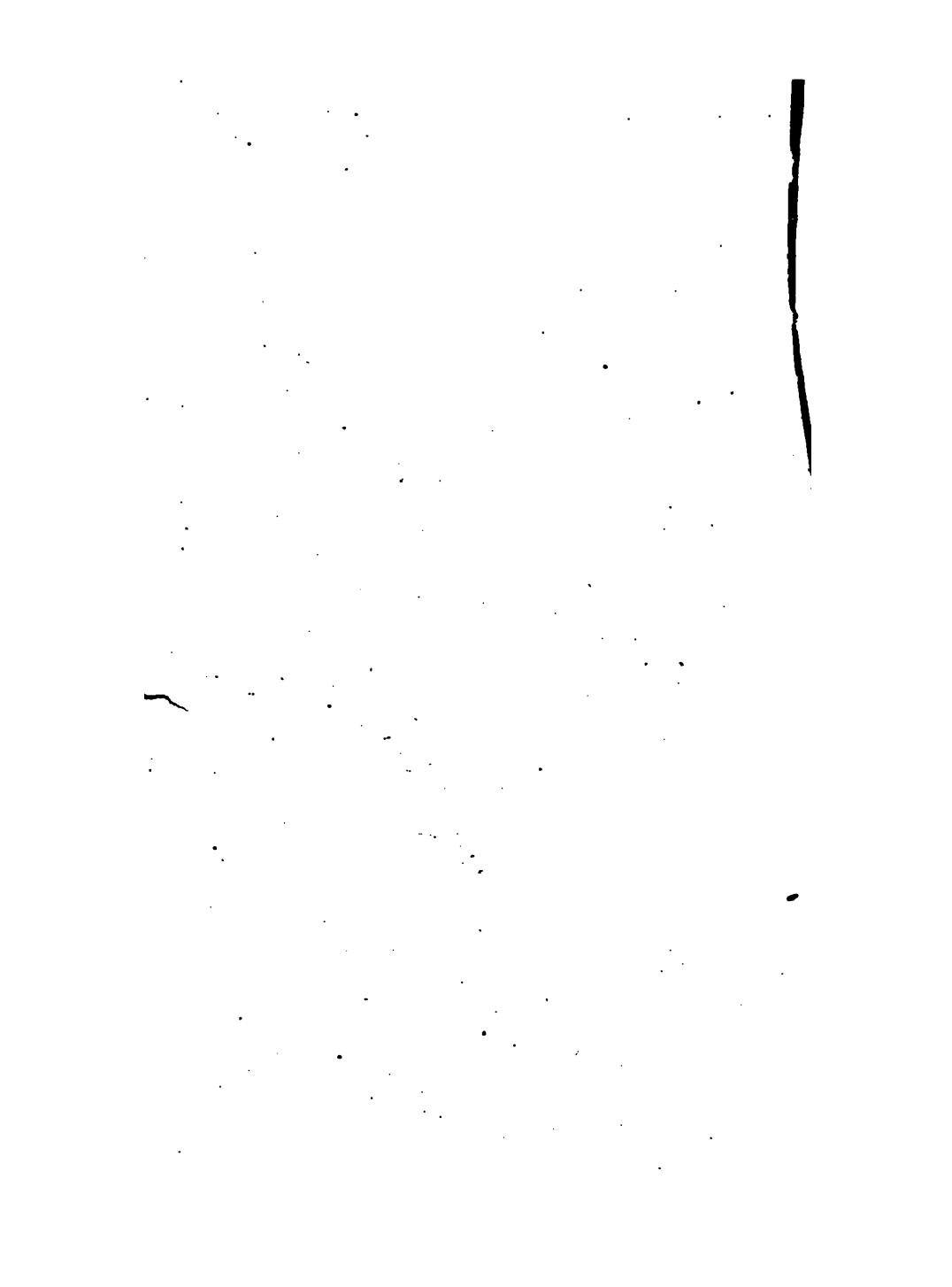
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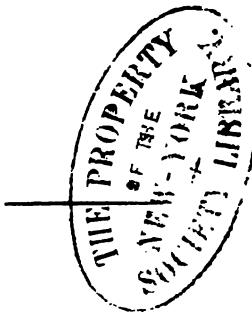
# JANET STRONG.

BY

VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND.

"My constant thought makes manifest  
I have not what I love the best;  
But I must thank God for the rest,  
While I make Heaven a verity."

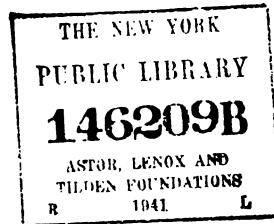
JEAN INGELOW.



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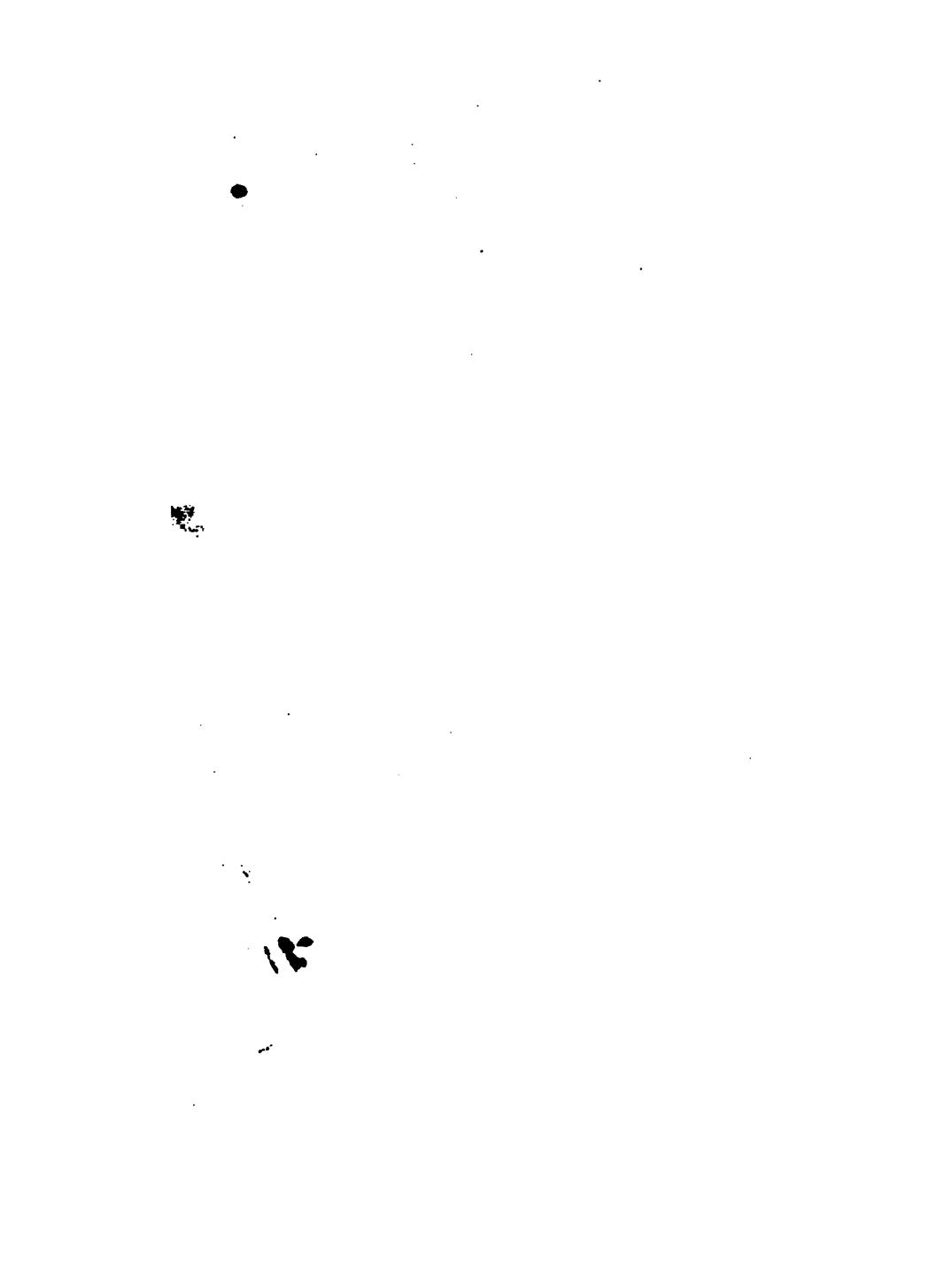
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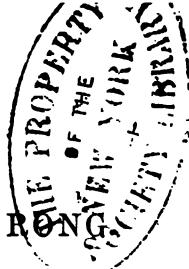
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AMONG the young of my sex there are many souls, friendless, perplexed, adrift, and afraid.

Unto some of these may my book come, like a soft, strong hand, reached out to their succor, or like a voice of warning, when their feet draw near the precipice, and the lights are gone out, and they walk through thick darkness.

V. F. T.





JANET STRONG

## CHAPTER I.

"THERE's no use in my trying to make anybody of myself; I'm only a servant-girl, anyhow. Everybody treats me in a way which shows they despise me, or at least don't think I'm of the smallest account. Nobody in the house to talk to but Biddy, the chambermaid, and black mammy, the cook. Of course I know I'm above them ; but nobody else thinks of it, and it'll always be just so—always, unless——"

The face of the girl who had indulged in this monologue had settled down into some want and pathos which was almost plaintive—a little girl's face still, for she was small for her years, and they were only sixteen.

She was dusting a large and luxurious parlor, in a listless, abstracted sort of fashion. The great brush flashed in and out of the carved rose-wood, and the velvet and plush, and over the heavy marble tables and the rich gilding of the volumes that lay on them.

A girl with an exceedingly pretty face, soft and rounded, and that promised to be in its full blossoming what most people would call handsome or beautiful. Large, clear blue eyes, a soft complexion, faint roses, which always seemed on the very point of widening out full in the dimpled cheeks. Lips of bright red, with the pleasant expression of girlhood hovering like an incipient smile about them, and bright, abundant brown hair,—this is the picture of Janet Strong, as she looked wielding with her bare round arms the great brush in Mrs. Kenneth's parlor that morning.

This young girl's history, running up the borders of those sixteen years, is that of a narrow, colorless, cramped life.

Her father died when she was a baby ; her brother, ~~several years her senior~~, went to sea and was lost.

They lived in the country, and until Janet was ten years old her mother managed, by the exercise of the most rigid economy, to keep soul and body of herself and child together. Then her health failed, and she sank into the grave.

One of the neighbors took Janet, and for two years the little motherless girl had a comfortable home, and learned to do light housework, and take care of two or three lumpy, lymphatic babies.

She was a bright, "handy" little creature; but the neighbor's oldest daughter grew up to fill her place, and then the little girl was sent into the factory to do light work.

So, in that groove was set the next four years of Janet Strong's life. Her work was not hard, and she was rather a favorite with the hands; and although her associations were anything but of an elevating, refining character, still she was a bright, cheerful, good-hearted little thing, and did not seem to absorb the evil in the social atmosphere about her. That bright, childish face was a testimony of the innocent little heart that throbbed beneath it.

At the close of Janet's fourth year at the factory, a lady, who had been stopping at the village hotel a few days, made application at the house where Janet boarded for a girl to go out to easy service in her city home.

She wanted an American girl, one who was trustworthy and active, and who could relieve the chambermaid and cook of some of their duties.

Janet's young imagination was at once dazzled with the prospect of seeing the city, and there was no one who had either the right or the disposition to exercise any authority over her movements. Mrs. Kenneth was pleased with the girl, and a bargain was completed to the satisfaction of both parties. So Janet came to the city—the little wondering country girl, full of interest and amazement at the new sights and the busy thronging life which on every side opened before her.

Mrs. Kenneth was a somewhat exacting, but not, on the whole, hard mistress. She was a lady of wealth and influence, occupied a high position in society, and a prominent one in the fashionable church of which she was a member; a woman of respectabilities and conventionalities, by no means altogether heartless—one who would have honestly recoiled at the thought of being a hypocrite.

*Mrs. Kenneth was the president of one benevolent society*



and the secretary of another, besides belonging to a visiting committee for the orphan asylum, and being one of the managers of an institution for infirm old ladies; indeed, she enjoyed an enviable reputation for great executive benevolence.

But for that young life just opening into girlhood under her roof, with its pitiful lack of all experience—of all judicious counsel, with its opening capacities for enjoyments, with its dreams and fancies, its hungers and cravings, its chafings and limitations, this woman, wife though she had been, and mother though she was, had never a thought or a care.

Janet was to Mrs. Kenneth a servant—a being of a different sphere—not to be overworked, certainly, to be well fed and sheltered, for Mrs. Kenneth was not penurious, and her instincts of order and comfort embraced somewhat all who were under her roof; but beyond this she never went. Janet Strong's nature was quite out of her range of sympathies, regards, interests. Her very presence betrayed ~~to~~ to the girl's keen, susceptible instincts. That cold, mild voice unconsciously but absolutely disclosed to her just what position she occupied in her mistress's regard. She belonged to an ~~inferior~~ order. There was no common ground of womanhood or human needs on which these two could meet in this woman's thought. Into the secret place where the soul of Janet Strong, her servant-girl, abode, her mistress could never enter. The most she could do was to be "kind" to that sort of people—a kindness which always had some subtle power of impressing them with a sense of the immense distance between them. Janet was not slow to learn this. It cost her some keen pain—some loss of self-respect, for in the sleepy old factory town the difference in social position was not so sharply defined, and Janet had never regarded herself as less worthy of esteem because she was an industrious little girl, and earned her own bread after her mother died.

And there was a natural grace about the child, and so much brightness and adaptation, that a single year's change of life and social and mental cultivation would have placed her in all apparent respects on an equality with most of the young girls who visited Mrs. Kenneth's daughters.

So the girl's life was a solitary and desolate one under the *stately roof of Mrs. Kenneth*. She was naturally of an af-

fectionate nature, and her soul, restless, hungry, cramped, wanted something to lean on and grow. She had no society, for the people in the parlor were as much above, as those in the kitchen were beneath her. Biddy was a good-natured Hibernian, of the garrulous, gadding type; and "Mammy," with her red and yellow turbans, was the victim of moods, sometimes running over with jokes, and shaking her fat sides with laughter that fairly threatened to suffocate her, and making Janet laugh too, until the tears filled her eyes, and then sharp and crusty, making it a moral impossibility for Janet to please her.

The girl's young mistresses were kind on the whole, lent her books, which solaced many a weary hour, for Janet had a good deal of time to herself, and Mrs. Kenneth's daughters never read works except of a sound moral tone; and among others, Janet devoured Abbott's histories with a great delight.

So six months rolled over her—slow months they were, after all, with a good many burdens and heartaches, and a longing for something, she didn't quite know what—something good, and beautiful, and grand in the world, and that kept her awake nights, and that made her carry through the day a dim, vague sense of wrong, defiance, discontent, and gave a certain wistful look to her face.

One evening the family had all gone to some party, and Biddy was off, as usual, among her friends, and Mammy had gone to bed with a headache, and so the whole house was left to the sole charge of Janet. She was unusually restless that evening, wanting somebody to talk to, and going out on the veranda, and looking up at the great stars which hung thick in the sky, like golden buds, ready to break into great fields of blossoms, and wondering whether her mother could look down from far above them and see how lonely and desolate her little daughter was, and how she longed to throw herself down at her mother's feet and hide her head in her lap, and cry away some of the slow ache, and cold, and unhappiness which had lain at her heart all that day.

And while she stood there looking at the stars, the bell rang, and startled Janet with the consciousness that there were two great tears on her cheeks.

She brushed these away, and proceeded to the door. A young gentleman stood there, who started as the girl opened it, and revealed herself in the gaslight. Indeed Janet looked

sweet enough to strike anybody that evening, in the pretty white and blue plaid that she had on for the first time, with the roses a little wider than usual in her cheeks, and her brown hair in soft, thick braids about her ears, for Janet had some artistic sense of pretty and becoming colors and forms.

"Excuse me," said the dark, handsome young gentleman, who hardly looked his twentieth year; "but is Mrs. Kenneth, my aunt, at home?"

It was very flattering to find that the young gentleman did not suspect she was "a servant."

"Mrs. Kenneth and the young ladies are all out, sir, this evening," answered simply the girl, with the blushes brightening vividly in her face; and there was nothing in the tones nor the manner of Janet Strong which betrayed to the well-bred young gentleman her true position in his aunt's household.

"Thank you, miss! I've run up to the city for a few days from college, to see my father, Mr. Crandall, Mrs. Kenneth's brother, of whom you probably have heard her speak."

"Yes, often, sir," stammered Janet.

"And I should like to crave the privilege of coming in and staying myself a few moments, for I've had a long walk, not taking kindly to the crowded omnibuses this evening."

"Certainly, sir," answered Janet, holding the door wider, a good deal flattered, a great deal pleased, and feeling a little awkward in her false position.

Mrs. Kenneth's nephew came in to the softly lighted parlor, and Janet, hardly knowing what else to do, inquired if he would like the paper.

"Oh, no! thank you. Are the servants all absent, that you are left in charge of the house and the door this evening?" asked the gentleman, with a smile, his dark eyes fixed admiringly on the face of the girl.

"No, sir—that is—you are mistaken," and now the blushes rolled in a crimson tide up from the girl's cheeks to her forehead, making her face prettier than ever. "I am one of Mrs. Kenneth's girls, and often wait on the door."

The young man was so astonished that he did not speak for a moment, but his face did for him.

"Is it possible? I should never have dreamed it."

Poor Janet! She felt at that moment more keenly than

ever before the inferiority of her position ; and it was natural she should seek to extenuate it in some way, for she dreaded the dreadful fall she must necessarily have in the estimation of Mrs. Kenneth's nephew.

" I was not always like this," she said, in an apologetic, appealing way which was really touching ; " but my mother died a long while ago, and I had no friends, and so was obliged to take care of myself, and this is the first time I ever lived out."

" It's a shame, a real shame !" and he spoke out of his heart then, for he really did feel sorry for the young girl, and angry at her fate at that moment.

Then the gentleman asked her to sit down, and Janet was quite used to sitting in the parlor during the absence of the family, as Mrs. Kenneth thought it unsafe to leave the front of the house quite unoccupied when the windows were open.

So they fell to talking—this young man and Janet ; and the girl soon felt considerably at her ease before him, although it always fluttered her when she encountered his eyes, looking with such undisguised admiration on her face. She took care not to meet them very often, however ; but for all that, she was quite certain that his gaze never deserted her.

Robert Crandall was a great favorite with young girls and women in his own position. Handsome, graceful, with remarkable conversational gifts of a certain kind, impulsive, generous, social, he was regarded as one of the best fellows in his class ; and the beauty and simplicity of Janet Strong—the surprise on the discovery of her real position, and—let us be just—some pity for her loneliness, and her being so evidently out of place, aroused the interest and touched on the sympathies and the romance of Robert Crandall's nature.

It was certain the young man had never exerted himself more to make a favorable impression on any young lady than he did this night on Janet Strong—never watched with more eagerness the effect of his words and manner than he did on that shy, drooping, half-childish face.

" You must find it very lonely here, I am sure, occupying a position so trying to one like yourself in this household." This was said in a tone of deep and grave sympathy which could not but find its way to the heart of a young girl in Janet's situation.

"Oh, very! You see Biddy and the black cook are not society for me, and there are many times each day when I am lonely and unhappy."

"Poor child! I can well understand it. And you have no relatives, no friends to remove you from all this?"

"Nobody," said the mournful voice of Janet Strong, and so she was drawn into telling this kind stranger the little plaintive story of her life. She did it in her eager, simple way, with a meaning in her face, and tones which gave the words new force and picturesqueness; and certainly Robert Crandall did not lose any of them. He said a great many sympathetic, comforting words to Janet, which fell into the poor, little, lonely, half-frozen heart, like precious warmth, and light, and dew; and after an hour or two had slid away in this talk, the gentleman looked at his watch and discovered that it was really very late.

"I wish I could be of some service to you, Janet," he said, as he rose up. "You must permit me to call you so, and regard me always as a friend or a brother who could gladly serve you if he could. I suppose you've seen very little of the city, shut up here?"

"I go out two or three times a week, and to church every ~~Sunday~~, and I've learned my way through a great many streets."

"Still, it can't be half so pleasant going alone. I should really like to show those bright eyes of yours—blue as the mists of your country hills—some of the sights in our great city. If you could only get out some evening now, and take a little walk with me?"

"Oh! you are too kind, Mr. Crandall," stammered Janet, her face aglow with delight.

"I am so only to myself then. But to this matter--when shall you have an evening to yourself?"

"Oh, almost any time that Biddy will stay at home!"

"Well, supposing we arrange a walk for to-morrow evening. It may be wiser, and more in accordance with your own wishes, as it is nobody's concern, and there is, of course, not the shadow of an impropriety in it, to say nothing on the subject to any person. I will be on the corner at eight o'clock, and you can merely state to Aunt Caroline you wish to meet a friend not far from here. I am sure you can manage it easily, and the walk will be certain to do your health good."

"Oh, yes, I can manage it!" said the timid voice, with a little tremulous flutter of pleasure and excitement in it.

He bade her good evening; taking her hand and pressing it after, to say the least, a most friendly fashion; and so they parted.

"Well, this is an adventure!" murmured Robert Crandall to himself as soon as he gained the street. "Quite a romance, in fact. It's a shame for that pretty little face to be buried up in this fashion. I can imagine what sort of a life she must lead under my stately, very proper, and dignified aunt's shadow; and yet there's the making of a lady in that girl. It'll do her some good to see a little of the world, and of course I wouldn't do her a particle of harm in any way—of course not."

Robert Crandall held himself an honorable gentleman, and believed that he would scorn to do a mean act, or one for which he would blush for shame before his fellow-men. He was the son of a rich man, and had led a luxurious, self-indulgent life. He was now twenty-one, had a good stand in his class, and although always ready for a jolly time with his classmates, was never guilty of any serious misdemeanors, unless sometimes breaking the tutors' windows, or getting a little too "gay" at some supper, could be named among these; "but then," his father said complacently, "Robert was only twenty-one, and you couldn't expect a fellow to get over sowing his wild oats at that time."

The young man certainly did not analyze the motive which had prompted so much effort on his part to make a favorable impression on his aunt's domestic, or the feeling of exultation which thrilled him at the evident result. Robert Crandall was not much given to probing his own motives or impulses.

Janet Strong went up to her room that night in a tumult of excitement and pleasant emotion. Poor child! It was no wonder that she caught at this new experience which had broken so suddenly into that dull, empty, desolate life of hers. It swept off, like a great high tide from the shores of her barren existence, all that aching sense of humiliation and insignificance which she had carried through so many weary days. This handsome, refined, elegant gentleman had evidently found a great deal in her to admire. Her woman's instinct assured her of this. How it suddenly *elevated her in her own estimation!* What a sweet offering

to her long wounded self-love was the thought! She stood before the mirror in her small but very comfortable chamber, and looked at the face that smiled back on her there, with the soft, bright flush in her cheeks, the new gladness in her eyes. Then, first, there dawned upon her the conviction that she was pretty—beautiful. She had never thought much of it before, although the girls at the factory had told her she was sure to be handsome some day; but now there was danger of her overestimating her personal attractions, as pretty women are likely to do. She looked at her hands—nice hands they were; almost as small and fair as her young mistress', for the light factory and domestic work had hardly enlarged or darkened them. It was evident she had not appreciated herself at all! she thought with such a pretty, gratified smile, that one could have forgiven the vanity which lay at the bottom of it, and which was in some sense the natural assertion of her womanly nature, if there had not lurked so much danger in the wake of that feeling. And Janet Strong lay awake a long time that night, thinking over all that Mrs. Kenneth's nephew had said to her, and of the walk which they were to have to-morrow evening, and which altogether seemed so much like a beautiful dream, that she was half afraid she should wake up in the morning and find it one.

The next evening, a little after the appointed time, Janet hurried down the steps of Mrs. Kenneth's dwelling, in a flutter of expectation, hope, and wonder.

She found Mr. Crandall at the street corner, and he came forward to meet her eagerly, saying:

"It seems as though I had been waiting a long time for you, Janet!" and then he gave her his arm, with the grave courtesy that he would have offered it to the most accomplished lady of his acquaintance.

It was a pleasant evening in the early summer, with its solemn, far-off stars, that seemed faint and dim because of the golden stream of gaslight which throbbed down the air as far as their eyes could reach. They walked through the pleasantest thoroughfares. It was not likely, Robert Crandall thought, they would meet any one who could recognize his companion, and for his acquaintances, he did not mind—not one of them would suspect, as she leaned on his arm, that she was not some young girl in his own sphere.

*As for Janet, she gave herself up to the enchantment of*

the time. What a new beauty and glow the world put on to those blue eyes that would not be cheated of their youth's right to life and gladness!

It was astonishing how soon she began to feel at home with Robert Crandall—to confide in him just as was natural in the only friend she had in the world—how she told him all her little every-day troubles, in which he manifested so much deep and delicate sympathy, and her thoughts somehow seemed to clear themselves into appropriate words; for Janet's mother, though in no respect a cultivated woman, was, by nature, a refined one, and in the first ten years of the girl's life she had never had any coarse or lowering associations, as her whole language and manner betrayed.

They walked a long time, although it seemed short to Janet, and at last Robert Crandall insisted on taking her into a saloon, where she was fairly dazzled; and, seated at one of the small marble tables, the young man ordered fruits, and cake, and cream, and pressed them all on her with the kindest solicitude.

Janet reached home that night a little before the house was closed, which was not until eleven, and no questions were asked her. All Mrs. Kenneth's servants had friends in the city, and so they were in at the appointed hours she did not trouble herself with inquiries into their affairs.

But Janet did not leave her new friend until she had made an engagement to visit Greenwood in his company some afternoon in the following week, which he again suggested it would be as well not to mention to any one. He disliked to have curious people prying into his affairs, and he would be at the corner at the appointed hour. It was not difficult for her to obtain leave of absence for an afternoon and evening, and that visit to Greenwood was one long ecstasy to Janet Strong. How the heart of the country girl feasted on the sight of the green woods, the soft plush of the cool grass, the great trees, and the singing of birds! Among the beautiful walks, by the lakes and fountains, in the green and silent shade, she walked in a land of enchantment, and Robert Crandall enjoyed keenly this young, fresh, innocent nature laid bare before him. He still manifested the same deep, respectful interest in her happiness, and he had a thousand delicate ways of implying that he regarded Janet *as quite his equal, only shamefully out of place, a kind of lost princess indeed, who must some time occupy the place to*

which nature entitled her; and that, in some way, he intended to assist her toward this; in short, he was a kind of elder brother, on whom she must absolutely depend for counsel and guidance.

An older and wiser head and heart than Janet's might have been allured by all this delicate flattery; and she knew so little of the world, and nothing of the arts of men!

It was during this visit to Greenwood that the young man insisted on Janet's dropping her formal "Mr. Crandall," and calling him "Robert," just as his own little sister would. After this, Janet Strong led a charmed life, living in an atmosphere of intoxicating bliss. Several times every week, during the next month, Robert Crandall and she managed to be out together. He escorted her to various places, to picture galleries, to the museum, to the theatre, and on Sundays he accompanied her to church; and so Janet's life consisted in these meetings.

The world had become an entirely changed one to her. The sad, half-wistful look, as of some cramped, hungry soul, had quite gone out of her face. It blossomed into new hope and beauty. Even Biddy and "Mammy" were conscious of the change, and commented on her growing good looks.

For much of the time she seemed fairly to walk on air, and it was with difficulty she restrained the light and gladness at her heart from overflowing her lips in sudden songs, and snatches of poems she remembered!

Can you wonder that this lonely, desolate child, lost in the cold and darkness of the world, reached out eagerly for the first warmth and light that fell into her life? I charge you that you neither smile, nor condemn her; but rather weep tears of pity over her, for her heart was the heart of woman!

Still, there were times when there stole a little shadow among this girl's thoughts—a faint uneasiness, or depression. Some delicate instinct of hers recoiled from this long concealment of all acquaintance betwixt her and Robert Crandall. When she reasoned with herself on the subject, it seemed just right—the only thing, indeed, to be done; but that vague feeling still protested against it. This strict secrecy looked as if there was something wrong about these meetings. She wished sometimes they could be conducted openly; *and yet there was no one in the world whom she*

could make a confidant of. The idea of going to Mrs. Kenneth was too appalling to be entertained for a moment; in short, there was no help for it just now. Some time it would be different.

'Ah! this Janet Strong had once a good mother—a Christian mother, and in the early spring of her life she had sown her seed, not knowing which should bring forth fruit, this or that. But those early influences had not lost themselves. They gave their tone to the child's character, when the mother's lips were dust. Janet was wholly unconscious of it; but in a thousand ways her mother still spoke, and in this faint recoiling from whatsoever was not open and honest, but savored of dissimulation, might be traced the effects of her childhood's teaching—of that moral atmosphere in which it had taken root. Oh, good mothers, humble mothers, faint-hearted mothers, still striving, amid many cares, and much of trial and disappointment, to bring up your children in the fear and the love of God, you little know, day by day, what work you are doing—what harvests you are sowing!

"Unless!"—Our story has gone a long way back of that word with which its first paragraph closes, where Janet Strong stood with her duster in Mrs. Kenneth's parlor. Somehow the shadow we have mentioned lay heavier than usual on her heart that morning. She had been out the evening before with Robert Crandall to a concert, and on their return, they had stopped for some refreshments, and it happened that the house was closed a little while before the girl got in, and Mrs. Kenneth had heard the door-bell ring, and said to Janet next morning, in a tone of chilling reproof, "Those friends of yours must not detain you so late another evening."

"What would the stately lady say if she knew who that 'friend' was?" Janet chafed against this thought, feeling that she was practicing some deception on her mistress; she chafed too against her present life; she began to feel that she was suffering a great wrong in being limited to it. Indeed, the legitimate effect of Robert Crandall's influence must have been to cause her keen dissatisfaction with her present lot. But of a sudden the face of Janet leaped out of its discontent, and a new thought brightened it—"Unless Robert Crandall should fulfill his promise of finding her soon some new and more congenial position! And could

she doubt his will or his power to do this—her friend and brother?" Janet's thoughts never went beyond this relation, though she loved and trusted him as a solitary heart would be likely to its one friend in the wide world. She did not crowd the perspective of her future with any dazzling visions of marriage. Silly child! and yet in her innocence and ignorance to be almost envied too—she thought that the relations betwixt herself and Robert Crandall must continue forever, that he would always be her best, wisest, noblest friend, a tower of strength and shelter about her life.

"I mustn't get impatient," murmured Janet, giving the last touches of her dust brush to some vases on the mantle. "Didn't Robert tell me to have courage a little longer, and the way would certainly open for me out of all this? I must go up stairs and look at the beautiful brooch, with its carbuncle, like a coal of fire, which he gave me last week, and he said that his own sister would be proud to wear it. It always makes my heart grow warm to look at it. Oh, dear!" and a long-drawn sigh, half of pleasure and half of a great variety of other feelings, completed the monologue.

Just then the front door bell rang.

## CHAPTER II.

"**THERE** is a lady in the carriage who is ill," said the driver, whom Janet confronted at the door.

And before the bewildered girl could answer, a sweet pale face put itself out of the carriage window, and asked:

"Is mamma—is Mrs. Kenneth at home?"

"Oh, it's Miss Louise!" exclaimed Janet, remembering that Mrs. Kenneth's eldest daughter, whom she had never seen, was daily expected home from a lengthy absence with some friends in the country.

"Yes," smiled the young lady faintly, leaning her head back against the cushions. "I am she. Won't you call the girls?"

Janet descended to the pavement.

"The young ladies are gone out with Mrs. Kenneth," she said; "but I can call Biddy."

"No. I prefer to get in quietly if I can, and the thought of Biddy's loud sympathies jars my nerves. I'll try to get in with the aid of your arm, driver; for it makes me dizzy to move. There are my traveling-bag and some bundles in the carriage. Won't you attend to them?" The young lady addressed these words to Janet, while she was slowly preparing to alight.

The driver assisted her into the house, and Janet following with the bundles, found her on the sofa, quite exhausted with the effort she had made. Janet's sympathies were keen; moreover, she felt drawn at once to this sweet-faced, pleasant-voiced young girl.

"Can't I help you, ma'am?" she said, coming forward with her eager, sympathetic face. "I'll do anything that's in my power."

Louise Kenneth raised her heavy eyes to the girl's face.

"Yes. I think you can. Just remove my bonnet and shawl, and help me up stairs, to my own room. If I can only lie down there, and get this dreadful motion and noise of the *cars out of my head!*"

Janet had what New Englanders call a "handy" way of doing things, a swift, light, executive touch, so grateful to throbbing temples.

Louise Kenneth discovered this, as she softly untied her bonnet, and unclasped her traveling cloak, and the sick girl went on talking, half to herself, half to Janet, her face paling and burning alternately.

"I suppose I was very injudicious to attempt such a journey alone; but I was disappointed in my promised company, and came the last hundred and fifty miles quite alone; and I began to grow ill almost as soon as my traveling companions left me. What a long, tedious night it was!"

"It must have been. Now, if you will only lean on me, I will help you up stairs carefully. Don't be afraid, ma'am. I'm very strong."

It was well for Janet that she was, for before they reached the staff-landing, Louise Kenneth was seized with such a sudden faintness and dizziness that she was compelled to lean her whole weight on Janet, or she must have fallen to the floor. At last, however, Janet got the sick girl to her bed, darkened the room, and cooled the burning forehead with cologne water. Once under the touch of those soft, magnetic fingers, Louise Kenneth opened her eyes, and looked at the young face bending over her.

"What is your name?" she asked.

"Janet—Janet Strong. I have been living with your mother several months."

"I am very glad to find you here. You must stay with me, Janet, until I fall asleep. I shall wake well enough," with that sort of clinging, helpless feeling, which comes with sickness; and soon after she sunk into a slumber, restless and fitful.

Great was Mrs. Kenneth's surprise and solicitude when she learned, on her return home, of her daughter's sudden arrival and illness. But Louise Kenneth's prophecy did not fulfill itself when she awoke. She was with difficulty made to comprehend where she was, and heavy drowsiness and fierce excitements of fever alternated with each other. Of course the family was greatly alarmed, and the physician, who was called at once, tended little to allay the fears of the mother and sisters.

The fever, he said, had set in vigorously, and it would probably be several days before it attained its height. It was

too late to arrest the disease now, and all that could be done was to give the patient absolute quiet and careful nursing.

The doctor's prediction was verified. For more than a week did Louise Kenneth lie in the grasp of that terrible fever, which fired her pulses and frenzied her brain. Her life was not in immediate peril, still there was room for terrible anxiety on the part of those who loved her. Mrs. Kenneth would not allow any one to occupy her post by the bedside of her suffering child; but the light feet and skillful hands of Janet were often called into requisition in the sick chamber. Perhaps it was best for her that she had something at this juncture to arouse her sympathies and occupy her time, but in that light certainly did not Robert Crandall regard it. I do not wish for a moment to imply that he did not feel some regret at his cousin's serious illness, but the annoyance and vexation which he experienced in the deprivation of Janet's society, certainly in a great measure absorbed all other emotions.

For this girl had become the central object of his thought. He remembered with a feeling of exultation which he had not the courage to analyze, that Janet was without friend, protector, or relative in the world, who had the remotest claim on her, and he was resolved to place her in circumstances where their interviews should not be subjected to the slightest danger of espionage from any quarter.

That matters could not go on long in this way, the young man had sense enough to perceive, and a discovery of these surreptitious interviews might transpire any time, and involve him in most embarrassing explanations. The best plan was to get Janet away from his aunt's; and Robert Crandall devoted several days to the concoction of some method by which she could be induced to remove to the city where he was studying.

It would not do for her to go out to service. In case she did, his visits would at once subject both of them to remark and suspicion; and, after this fashion, dismissing various plans which suggested themselves, one entered his mind, which he turned over on all sides, and then settled upon as presenting no serious objection, as had the others. In the city where the college was located, was a confectionery establishment, much frequented by the students for its pleasant, *easy, attractive* belongings. Betwixt Robert Crandall and

the proprietor, a free-and-easy acquaintance had for some time existed. This store employed two or three young girl-clerks, and Robert Crandall was certain that his influence could procure Janet a situation here.

"It will be doing her a great favor to get her into this store, for it's highly respectable, and it's a shame to have such a girl in my aunt's kitchen any longer;" trying, with words like these, to cheat himself, even, by glossing over facts, which he had not the moral courage to face. For Robert Crandall was young in years, and fresh in evil, and the better side of his nature still recoiled from confronting any deed of wrong; and thus far he laid no plans beyond getting Janet this situation in the store.

He wrote to the proprietor a letter which brought a prompt and favorable reply, with no suspicion on that individual's part that there was anything more than appeared in the matter, for Robert was careful to represent Janet as a friend of his in depressed circumstances, whom he was anxious to serve.

A vacancy, which Janet could supply as clerk and waitress, would present itself in a few days. And with his usual tact, Robert Crandall approached the matter in his next walk with the girl, concentrating all his former suggestions and promises about exerting his influence to rescue her from her present position, in the revelation which he now made.

He first aroused her curiosity and interest by remarking, in a tone pendulous betwixt significance and exultation, that his efforts had at last been crowned with success, and that he had secured Janet, his little sister, a position, which he could see her occupying without feeling that she was shamefully out of the place for which nature designed her, as some rare moss rose would be among thistles and sun-flowers; or a beautiful, sweet-voiced canary among owls and crows.

The foolish little heart throbbed with wonder, the pretty face flushed all over at the sweet flattery.

"Oh, where is this place—what is it?" eagerly asked Janet.

Robert Crandall was in no hurry to gratify her curiosity. He went on descanting upon the time, and care, and diplomacy it had cost him to obtain this situation, and representing all these as ten times greater than they really were.

"*Oh, dear, how good you have been to me, Robert, my*

brother, my only friend!" and a fond grateful glance stole up to him from the child's blue eyes filled with tears; a glance of perfect faith and trust.

Robert Crandall drew his breath hard. Somehow that look made him feel for the moment that he was a villain. But he thrust back the feeling with a plausible lie to his conscience—"I am not going to do this girl any harm. It is for her good certainly to accept this situation."

And when he spoke again, he told Janet, who held her breath for interest, what and where the situation was, painting it in most attractive colors, and as being advantageous in all respects. Janet was half bewildered at this rose-colored portrait of her future; but her mind sought refuge in a practical fact.

"I've no doubt it would all be very beautiful, Robert, but I'm afraid I shouldn't suit. I never waited on a store in my life, and I don't even know how to weigh out sugar-plums."

"Oh, well, you dear little shrinking, frightened soul, I've no fears on that score. You'll learn soon enough, and give ample satisfaction, I'm confident; and then, only think, Janet, we shall be so near each other, and I can have such a brotherly care over you, and I've promised myself so much pleasure in the nice walks we shall have together, with no need of concealment then; and there are so many delightful rambles about the old town to which I want to introduce you!"

"Yes; that will be best of all," subjoined Janet, her fears vanishing before her companion's confidence in her abilities.

It is in the nature of woman to rise equal to the occasion, to prove herself all that is expected of her.

"And then, there is the salary. You haven't asked me about that, little Janet!"

"I haven't thought of it, really, Robert—you were telling me so many good things."

"Well, this isn't the least of them. You are to have your board and two hundred a year."

The girl stood still with surprise. This was three times the amount Mrs. Kenneth paid her. She seemed suddenly to have come into the possession of a fortune; and glowing visions of beautiful dresses and showy hats floated through the child's imagination. Robert bent down his eyes to her face, and saw that surprise had quite deprived her of speech.

"You didn't expect so large a salary," he said. "In a year I expect you'll be able to earn thrice as much as that; but we must be content with small things at first. And now about the best time and method of your coming, for I must have all that settled before I return to college, which you know must be day after to-morrow."

"I shall tell Mrs. Kenneth that I am going. I think that she will be satisfied with a week's notice."

But Janet's proposition did not at all tally with Robert Crandall's plans. Like all people who are bent on accomplishing something they are ashamed of, the young Junior was extremely fearful that his secret would somehow get to light. He believed that his aunt could not readily supply Janet's place, and would not relinquish her without reluctance; and she would be very likely to make embarrassing inquiries about Janet's future destination.

The girl was too honest, and too little used to intrigue or deception of any kind, to be a match for his aunt in a matter like the present; and if Mrs. Kenneth's curiosity or suspicions were aroused, her nephew knew very well it would be no easy thing to baffle her. He knew he could trust Janet to the death, unless, getting an inkling of some wrong about to be done her youth and innocence, his relative should work on her fears, or her conscience, and the whole should come out, and then—what a denouement there would be!

He was brave enough in most things, this Robert Crandall, but he fairly shuddered at the thought of such an exposé of his conduct. He spoke a little more decidedly than he was aware of, under the influence of this feeling.

"No, Janet, you must not contemplate for a moment telling my aunt that you intend to leave her roof. She would be certain to suspect something, and annoy you with all manner of inquiries. You must ~~get off~~ without letting a soul know where you are going."

Janet looked at him, amazed, half appalled.

"What, run away, Robert, as though I was a thief! You don't mean I must do that?"

"Not as a thief certainly, my dear child," in a greatly modified tone. "But I want to save you from the trials to which I see you will inevitably be subjected if you do not take my advice in this matter. I have arranged it all perfectly for you. I have engaged a trusty man, who was formerly a gardener of my father's, to come for your trunk some

night that we shall decide on. You must have it all ready, and he will convey you and it to the cars and see you safely on board. Of course you won't mind riding all night, and you will reach Mystic depot about nine o'clock in the morning, at which place I shall meet you, and we will take breakfast, and have a delightful ride of fifty miles together."

"That will be charming, Robert!" responded the girlish voice. "And yet," with a little timid appeal of tone and manner, "I *should* like to tell Mrs. Kenneth that I am going. It has a strange, wrong look to go off without saying a word, and I shall only explain that I am going to my friends, which is quite true, and as for their finding out any more—you know I can keep a secret, if I am a girl!"

She said this with a certain mingling of dignity and archness, which was quite bewitching in the eyes of Robert Crandall. He was too shrewd to attempt to argue the matter further. He knew the side where the little heart was weakest.

"Well, Janet, then if you will compel me to say it, I shall be saved a great deal of pains and trouble by your falling in with my plan. I have devoted so much time to arranging this matter, that I have not a moment left for explanations, glad as I should be to please my little sister, or relieve her from any foolish scruples on her part. But she knows that I would not advise her to any wrong step, or one that circumstances did not fully justify, however things may seem. Janet, you trust me, your brother, in all things—will you fear to in this one?"

The manly, pleading voice—the tender, smiling eyes—they were irresistible. She believed in this man with all her soul. Poor Janet!

So it was settled at last that some day in the following week Janet should have her trunk ready, and the gardener should call for it at the side door, which she always attended, and where his presence would excite no remark. On the same evening Janet was to meet this man at the corner, who would accompany her to the cars, and meanwhile telegraph to Robert Crandall, so that he would be certain to meet her at Mystic.

The gardener was a good, honest-hearted fellow, Robert said, with whom he had been a favorite when a boy, and who only knew, in a general way, that the young student wished to get Janet a situation in a store, and that there were reasons for keeping the affair entirely secret for the present.

So, in a tumult of feelings, mostly glad ones, the child parted with Robert Crandall; and his leave-taking was so regretful, and tender, and grave, that it could not but leave a deep impression on her susceptible nature. And at that moment there was not much acting on the part of Robert Crandall, for he really was fond of the girl, and it went sorely against him to part with her even for a week.

He walked home rapidly after he had watched her disappear in Mrs. Kenneth's side door; and once some thoughts stirred him, which made him set his lips, and his face darken desperately for a moment. But the next moment he laughed —a light, forced laugh, and muttered to himself:

"As if I was doing this child any wrong, or laying any plan to, by getting her a snug little berth at the confec-tioner's! It's a perfectly respectable place, and one to which the dear little innocent soul is just adapted, and I'm sure I've no reason so far to repent the favor I've done her, and I never intend to."

Now there was just truth enough in this reasoning to furnish a moral opiate to the conscience of Robert Crandall. He was neither good enough nor bad enough to meet the future—to look its consequences in the face; and if, sent by warning angels, there came sometimes over him foreshadowings of bitter remorse, that must inevitably sting through all the years of his life, for wrong that could not be atoned for, he thrust them down with sophistries that only half cheated himself, for down deep in his own soul, Robert Crandall knew that in the hour that Janet Strong went out from his aunt's roof, trusting herself and her innocence into his hands, in that hour she was *lost! lost! lost!*

The week that followed was hardly a happy one to this poor, flurried, bewildered Janet of ours. She tried to believe it was. She reasoned herself over and over again, into the belief that she was doing just what was right and best under the circumstances, and each time was satisfied that she had convinced herself beyond the possibility of doubting again that this surreptitious departure from Mrs. Kenneth's was perfectly justifiable under the circumstances. But, before she knew it, she was fluctuating again; again she would find herself among the old doubts and fears; the moral instincts of this girl would assert themselves, the old, blessed, mother-influence would make itself felt. Some vague foreboding

still hovered over her, some fear, some doubt that she could not have concentrated in words, some intuition that she was not doing a fair and honorable thing to run away from her home in this fashion. She tried to put away all such haunting thoughts and fears by dwelling on the future, on the new, charmed life that awaited her, on all its pleasures and independence, and best of all, on the constant society of her only friend, her handsome, noble brother, Robert Crandall.

What plans she laid of self-improvement in all directions, so that he should never be ashamed of her! she would make a lady of herself for his sake; and Janet, though now disposed to set a much higher value on her gifts of mind and person than formerly, did not suspect quite how far nature had assisted her in these aspirations. Then she would chide herself as wicked and ungrateful toward the friend who had taken all this pains and care for her sake, not to be willing to be guided by his wishes and better judgment in this matter as in all others.

Oh, my reader, I charge you that you feel no contempt, only pity all-embracing, for this girl, lonely, friendless, orphaned, over which just now it seemed that angels might weep or fiends exult. Well for it for you, if in her strait your wisdom were greater, your motives purer. For no suspicion of Robert Crandall's truth, fidelity, brotherly devotedness ever crossed the thoughts of Janet Strong. To her he was the incarnation of all nobleness, tenderness, honor—of all those great and gentle qualities which go to fashion a young girl's dream of manhood. And if away back in her soul was any latent instinct of doubt or fear which judicious counsel might have developed, she was now wholly unconscious of it.

Still, just at this time she did hunger more than ever for some friend into whose ear she might pour her whole story—it seemed as though the telling it would relieve that sort of uncertain pain which carrying such a heavy secret sometimes made at her heart. If her mother was only living now! and then Janet's thoughts would go back to the sorrowful, loving face, and she would wonder what she would have said to all this, whether she would just have approved of this secret departure—the mother who taught her young daughter that a *lie* was sin, and who sowed her seed away off in the dawn of her child's life, not knowing whether, amid the rains and the *sunshine*, it would take root; yet whose voice crept down the long years, still calling to the soul of her child.

Robert Crandall in the mean while was impatient for Janet's arrival; he could not feel at ease while she was under his aunt's roof, and his letters urged her to appoint the day that she would come to him; besides, he affirmed, the proprietor of the store to whom she was engaged needed her services at once; and then followed an allusion to somebody else who needed her society more than all the rest, and who would not be content until he had his little protégé under his own sole care and protection.

Precious fact, put in most graceful, flattering words; and in a flutter of pleasure, gratitude, and affection, Janet sat down, and with infinite pains wrote her first letter, and although the handwriting betrayed a certain stiffness, still on the whole it would not have done discredit to any school-girl of her age; and Janet appointed the day that she would come, and afterward she set her face steadily against all misgivings. It was too late to be troubled now, she told herself, and set to work to packing her trunk.

In the mean while Louise Kenneth was recovering from her illness, and able now to sit up for an hour or two in her chair. The young lady had taken a fancy to Janet, who had been with her much of her illness, and made herself so useful and grateful to the invalid that she had several times received the commendations of Mrs. Kenneth.

Louise had a finer, broader nature than her mother. Her sympathies took a wider range—her character was richer, fuller of warmth and impulse. Then she had been for the last six months in a finer, more healthy atmosphere than that of her own home. The aunt, after whom she was named, was of different grain from Mrs. Kenneth. Nobler motives and deeper flowing sympathies swayed her life. She worshiped neither respectability, position, nor any other of the gods of this world. Her home and personal influence had reached the best part of her niece's character. Louise had cleaved her way out from a good many social illusions; her moral horizon had broadened; her aunt said the truth of Lopise when she affirmed that she had in her the making of a noble woman. And one day it happened that this girl sat in her great easy chair, her pale, sweet face resting among the cushions, and her idle fingers playing with the tassels of her rose-colored dressing-gown, while she watched Janet arranging the glasses and vases on her dressing cabinet. *It happened that the two girls were quite alone.*

Louise was in that softened, sympathetic mood, which convalescence brings to most natures, especially to one like hers. And as she dreamily watched Janet—the pretty face, the girlish figure, the swift, light movements, some new feeling of interest and pity came over the other's heart, which at last cleared itself into words.

"Janet, you have been a great comfort to me, ever since I have been ill."

Janet turned at the soft voice, with a touched, pleased look.

"I am very glad to hear it, Miss Louise. I hardly supposed I should ever be that to anybody here."

The girl did not know it, but a little pathos crept into the last part of her speech, and there was a certain dignity in it too. Janet had not been so intimate all these weeks with a man of Robert Crandall's cultivation without growth in many ways. This struck Louise; and her next remark, although in some sense a general one, was made with the purpose of drawing out Janet.

"I suppose we all have feelings of despondency and uselessness sometimes when we are lonely or oppressed; but you see, as in your case, they are often without any reason."

"I'm glad to know that; and yet those who have friends to love and care for them, I should think would never have those moments of which you spoke."

"But, Janet, you don't mean to say you have nobody to love and care for you?"

Janet thought of Robert Crandall, and drew a long breath; still there was a sigh in her voice and face, as she answered:

"I haven't a relative in the world, as I know of, Miss Louise."

The heart of Louise Kenneth was stirred for pity.

"No father nor mother, no brother nor sister, Janet?"

"Not one. They are all dead!" softly and sorrowfully answered the girl.

Louise Kenneth looked at her, standing there in her youth, and loneliness, and beauty, and thought how all these might be a snare to her. She thought too, with a kind of shudder, of the cold, hard, desolate life that Janet must lead, and a great longing came over her to be of some service to the lonely orphan—to say some words of comfort, sympathy, warning, that she would always remember.

She forgot what her mother never could, that Janet was a servant, and met her on the common ground of their womanhood.

"Janet," she said, "come here, do, and sit down on this cricket, and tell me the story of your life. I want to know all about it, because I am your friend."

The kindly words unlocked Janet's heart, and she went and sat down and told her plaintive little story, sometimes broken for tears, of her childhood, of her mother's death, of the long years in the factory, until she came to Mrs. Kenneth's, and here Janet stopped abruptly. She could not speak of that one flower which had blossomed and brightened with color and fragrance the barren spaces of her life.

But her listener's intuition supplied much that the girl left unsaid. She knew that Janet must have a dreary, starved sort of life under her mother's roof, so far removed in character and sympathy from the servants, so far in position and circumstances from her mistresses. How she longed to speak to this girl some good, true words, that might avail for right in some great temptation and crisis of her life! and in that moment of pity and yearning, Louise Kenneth half involuntarily put out her hands and stroked the girl's hair, and it seemed to Janet that her mother's hand was there again.

"I understand, Janet, all that is sad and lonely in your life, in your position here, and I am sorry for you from my heart. But for all this don't get discouraged, my child. There may be a life of much usefulness and happiness before you." Janet smiled softly now, for she thought of Robert Crandall. "And," continued Louise, "of one thing be certain, that you always respect yourself, that you never do any wrong, hasty act, that even bitter repentance cannot in this world wholly atone for. The more lonely you are, the more apparently neglected and forgotten, the more reason that you should set higher value on yourself, and weigh more carefully all of your own actions."

Was some angel standing by and prompting the words of Louise Kenneth at that moment? Janet leaned toward her, her face flushed with interest, eagerness, and much which lay beyond all the speaker could fathom, as the girl seemed to drink in every word.

"And," continued Louise, drawn on by the girl's looks to

say more than she at first intended, "you will know some time, if you do not already, that you are pretty beyond what most women are, and men will be likely to tell you of this, and seek you and flatter you because of it. And herein may lie your greatest danger. I warn you—I, your friend, only a few years your senior, beseech of you to trust no man's promises, though he talk like an angel, if he attempt to persuade you into any act which your highest, truest judgment shall not approve. Do not be won by plausible talk or by appeals to your affection into anything that is not open, and candid, and true, anything that you would be ashamed that others should know. When a man urges you to any course of conduct which involves secrecy and deception, be sure that some evil lies at the bottom of it."

Janet listened with parted lips, and face that grew ashy pale; she covered it with her hands and trembled from head to foot.

"What is the matter?" asked Louise Kenneth, a faint suspicion of something wrong seizing her; but Janet's first stammered words diverted the suspicion.

"It is so hard! I have no friend to tell me what is right. Why haven't I, just like you, a mother to love and care for me, and a happy home? What is the reason that I must be all alone and desolate in the world?" She spoke with a kind of fierce vehemence, as though her life had been defrauded of its rights, and her soul at last roused itself to utter its protest against the wrong.

And Louise Kenneth entered into Janet's feeling at that moment, and all the wealth, and care, and tenderness which had been about her life seemed for the moment to rebuke her.

"Janet," she said, almost humbly, "I cannot understand it any more than you do. I think you deserve wealth and love, and all the pleasant things of this life, just as much as I, or my sisters. But perhaps your life will be as happy and as useful as ours; and it may be that the question which it is so hard to solve now will be answered, and we shall know what these differences in human lots mean. They have puzzled wiser heads than ours. But God does not regard them, however man may."

Janet looked at Louise Kenneth, and the sweet, pale face stood unconsciously that probing gaze which went down *into her soul and searched it.* A sudden impulse seized

Janet to confide to this girl all the story of her acquaintance with her cousin. She should not be afraid nor ashamed with her. She would hold nothing back.

Her lips parted, and—but just then the door opened, and Mrs. Kenneth entered the room. She looked a little surprised, although not displeased, at seeing the positions of the two girls.

"I hope I haven't interrupted a tête-à-tête," she said, which was a wonderful condescension on the part of Mrs. Kenneth, as the remark was addressed as much to Janet as to her own daughter.

## CHAPTER III.

"LOUISE," said Mrs. Kenneth, as soon as she was alone with her daughter, "I've just come from a long interview with the doctor, regarding you. He thinks we must get you off to the mountains as soon as possible. What do you think of starting, as he recommends, the early part of next week?"

The young convalescent turned her startled face toward her mother.

"I am not strong enough for such a journey, mamma; I can hardly get across the room now."

"And for that very reason we want to get you into a more invigorating atmosphere. My dear child," and the mother in her made the voice and face of Mrs. Kenneth very tender as she leaned forward and stroked the thin, pale cheek—"I want to get the lost plumpness and some fresh roses here; and we must carry you to the mountains in quest of them."

"Roses are not indigenous to this soil, mamma—I thought you knew that," with a half-arch, half-languid smile. "I fear our quest will be as vain as the search after the 'Fountain of Perpetual Youth.'"

Quite delighted to find that her daughter was getting back to her old playful style of talking, Mrs. Kenneth made some bantering rejoinder, but soon recurred to her first topic. She had made up her mind on Louise's immediate removal, and Mrs. Kenneth was a woman of great executive force. She never allowed small obstacles to stand in her way, and disposed of all those which her daughter, with the natural dread of exertion which comes with physical weakness, advanced to this suggestion, and at last Louise was half-persuaded, half-compelled, into consenting to the journey.

After this matter was settled, the young girl's mind reverted to Janet, and her sympathy and interest impelled her to speak to her mother.

"Mamma, do you know that I take a very unusual interest in this little Janet Strong?"

"I judged so, my dear, when I opened the door and found you both in such confidential attitudes."

"She was telling me the story of her life. Poor child! it is a touching one, and I was trying to give her a little counsel, such as a girl in her condition—pretty, poor, and friendless—would be likely to need. I owe her, at least, a debt of gratitude; she has been so kind and thoughtful during my illness."

"Yes! I have been much gratified with Janet's care for you. She is, as you say, a nice, handy girl; very well-behaved, too, for one in her position."

"But, mamma, she is really above her position—quite out of place, indeed. I am sure she feels it, too, though she is never intrusive. She can't find the society in the kitchen very edifying or congenial, and is excluded, of course, from that above it. But I am very sorry for her. Under different circumstances, she has in her the elements of a real lady."

"You are a little enthusiastic, my dear. Janet is certainly superior to most servants, but she seems to occupy the position in which Providence has placed her, and may be very happy in it. If we should put any new notions into her head, she would be likely to take on airs and become dissatisfied. I have learned from experience that it is dangerous to meddle with people in her condition; somehow, they can't bear it."

How different was this reply from the one which Louise was sure her aunt would have made under the circumstances! The contrast between the two women never struck her so vividly before. Perhaps for the first time in her life, Louise Kenneth was painfully conscious of something hard and narrow in her mother. She felt some barrenness of deep-flowing, generous sympathies. All the doors on the tender side of Mrs. Kenneth's nature were locked and barred against such as Janet. Louise would not have put the truth so plainly as this, but a little sigh half-articulated her conviction. Perhaps her mother heard it, for she added:

"I am glad that you take this kindly interest in the girl; I shall certainly do all that is in my power for her comfort and advantage."

So the conversation respecting Janet closed betwixt the mother and daughter. It was never resumed afterward.

Janet Strong went to her room in a tumult of feeling such as she had never experienced before. A great crisis

had come to this child's life. She little thought that this struggle was that old, new struggle of good and evil, which we must all carry, step by step, from the cradle to the grave.

The words of Louise Kenneth had not enlightened her; they had only quickened the intuitions, and doubts, and fears, which had troubled her so long.

Her faith in the man, Robert Crandall, was by no means perished. His presence, a few words from him, would have dissipated any slight suspicions which, never crystallized into thought, might still have floated in her mind. Still, she *felt* the force of what Louise Kenneth had said—her innate truthfulness compelled her to it.

But the heart of this poor Janet turned away from its highest conviction of right to the sweet persuasions of its own inclinations and desires. It was not right, perhaps—but oh, it was so very natural!

That new home beckoned her, with all its pleasant prospects and promises—the one friend in all the world who loved her, stood waiting with open hands and heart to receive her; new, easy tasks, with remuneration, which in her eyes were like riches, were offered her. Pride, affection, aspiration, ease, self-love—everything were in one balance. Ah! many a strong man has been bought with a less price than this to betray his highest loyalty to the right—many a woman has sold her birthright for a mess of pottage such as could not be named with this of Janet Strong's.

And then, in contrast with the new life, would rise up the old one—hard, and blank, and dreary; all the color and fragrance which Robert Crandall had given it vanished out of it. It made her very soul recoil to think about those times. She could not go back to them once more.

How could she grieve and offend the only friend she had on earth by refusing to go to him? Perhaps he would be so astonished and displeased that he would make up his mind never to write her—never to see her again; and no wonder if he did, when she was so ungrateful for all his care and pains.

"Oh, I will go—I *must* go," said Janet, over and over again to herself. She said it at her work, in her heart; she said it with her lips, in the silence of her own room; she said it when she first awoke in the morning, and she sank to sleep at night with these last words on her lips.

And how little Mrs. Kenneth, busy with her "Societies and Sewing-circles," her "Boards" and "Beneficiaries," dreamed of the mighty struggle which was going on under her own roof—that struggle which makes the one great Tragedy—the one mighty Reality of human life!

For Janet, although she told herself so many times she would surely go, still hesitated—still drew back. Something away down in her soul still protested, still warned, still entreated.

The soft, solemn voice of Louise Kenneth still echoed in the wide, silent spaces of her thoughts.

Confused, tossed, distracted, that conviction still held itself fast anchored in her soul that it was not honest—right to leave Mrs. Kenneth's house at the time and in the manner she had covenanted with Robert Crandall to do.

And to his credit, and Janet's too, be it written, that there had never transpired any word or act during their acquaintance which afforded her ground for the slightest suspicion that he was not in their relations all that he professed to be.

Something in Janet's youth and innocence had invested her with a kind of sacredness in his eyes, and Robert Crandall had always treated her with as much respectful tenderness as, in a different way, he did his own mother. The fond pressure of her hand, the soft kisses on her half-drooped forehead, had always in them that air of grave tenderness with which the young man might have bestowed them on the woman he was wooing for his wife; and in this there was no acting on his part—no coarse word or jest ever dropped from his lips in her presence. Thus far his aunt's servant was sacred in the eyes of Robert Crandall.

He took pleasure in the thought—a right one, sometimes—and alas! sometimes he took refuge in it, when there seemed to roll down from the future a solemn warning to him.

Janet's thoughts went over all this acquaintance with some new interest or curiosity; she could not have told *why* "that last night," as she said to herself, "she should ever sleep in her little room at Mrs. Kenneth's;" and there was nothing which suspicions far more alert than hers could have found to confirm themselves in any word or act of Robert Crandall's.

*She heard the clock strike midnight.*

"Oh, dear! I must be up early and pack my trunk to-morrow morning," said Janet, and she turned over, and after a long trial to forget everything, fell asleep.

And the next morning she was awake early, and packed her small wardrobe, for the man would call for it soon after dark.

But all that day she was restless and wretched—so much so, that once with a sense of utter loneliness crowding down on her, she was well-nigh tempted to hasten to Louise Kenneth and confide to her the whole story. But some friends of that young lady engrossed her every moment of the day that she could sit up; so this was not to be thought of, and probably Janet's heart would have failed her at the last moment.

Late in the afternoon she went up stairs to her own room again, and sitting down by her trunk sobbed passionately, for as the time drew near for her departure, some indefinable dread and foreboding seemed to grow on Janet Strong.

"I wish that I knew just what I ought to do," she murmured, with the tears dripping down her cheeks. "If my own dead mother was only here this minute, and I could lay my head right down in her lap and tell her just how it was, and ask her what I should do, and if she said, 'Don't go, Janet, my child,' why I wouldn't stir one step, not even for your sake, oh, my dear, darling brother, Robert Crandall!"

And with this name there came another passionate storm of tears out of the little bewildered, distracted heart, but beyond the tears a voice seemed to speak, "Janet, you believe—you are certain in your own soul that if your mother could speak to you now, she would tell you never to take this flight!"

Down there in the corner of her room, by her trunk, Janet sat with the great tears a-drip on her cheeks, rocking to and fro, deciding her destiny. The little maiden was in a sore strait. On one side was her dead mother's disapproval, for Janet did not attempt to refute the voice which had spoken the truth in her soul; on the other side was all which seemed to make life of any worth or gladness.

How she fluctuated back and forth, tossed on the winds and waves of her feelings and fears, I cannot tell—how the sweet young face grew white and drawn with that inward agony—how she wrung her hands and groaned out her

incoherent prayers for help,—all this you must surmise for yourself.

But at last she sprang up, shaking in every limb, lighted her lamp, and with hurried breaths, which were like deep-drawn sighs, wrote a note.

“DEAR, DEAR ROBERT—My friend and brother, I cannot come to you to-night. I have been wanting to all day—I long to now more than you can ever know; and it seems as though my heart was breaking to write this; but something away down there tells me I shall be doing wrong to run away without telling Mrs. Kenneth—that if my dead mother was here to-night she would tell me *I must not do this thing*. Oh, Robert! oh, my brother! my best, my only friend in all this wide, cold, dreary world, do not be angry with me, do forgive me, do still let me be to you

“Your loving sister, JANET.”

She folded this touching little epistle, that had leaped right out of her soul, and hurried down stairs, not daring to think the matter over, for fear her resolution would fail her.

In a few moments her heart sprung up into her throat, for she heard the side door bell. When she answered it, she found a large, tall man there, whose face she could not clearly distinguish in the semi-darkness, who asked her, in a low tone, if her name was “Janet Strong.”

“Yes.” She was shaking like a leaf driven about of autumn winds.

“Is your trunk ready?”

“No.” In a low, rapid, decided tone. “I cannot leave to-night. It is impossible. Here is a letter to Mr. Crandall, which explains all. Will you mail it at once?”

The man was evidently amazed and bewildered. He seemed uncertain what to do, and was on the point of expostulating with the girl, or making some inquiries respecting her decision. But Janet, in her earnestness and agitation, would not trust herself to listen.

“You must get that to the post-office at once—you must indeed,” she said, and closed the door.

Then she went up stairs. She did not know whether she was glad or sorry for what she had done; but oh! if her mother *in heaven* knew through what awful peril her child

had passed that night, and from what fate she had been scarcely delivered, that mother's song must have throbbed with new, silvery thankfulness through the wide, white spaces of heaven. As for Janet, she threw herself down on the bed, and, worn out by the tumult of feelings through which she had passed, dropped into a heavy slumber, and the angels rejoiced over her.

Four days had passed. They had been slow, miserable days to Janet, for she had not heard from Robert Crandall during this time, and a fear that she had offended him mortally, haunted and sickened her heart. Her sense of right and wrong became greatly confused at this time, and there were moments when she deeply regretted the course she had taken, and accused herself of the basest ingratitude in not trusting implicitly to the judgment of her only friend.

This internal strife blanched her cheeks, and banished the bloom and light from her face in a way that would certainly have excited remark, if the whole family had not been much engrossed in the departure of Mrs. Kenneth and her daughters, for it was finally resolved that her sisters should accompany Louise to the mountains.

This evening of which I am to write, Janet was left quite alone in the house, for the young ladies were out at a party, and would not be home before midnight. And Janet walked alone up and down the parlor, her young face fallen into a great sadness and pain that was pitiful to see, with the doubt in her brain, and the pain in her heart.

The bell rang suddenly. It was nothing very unusual, but Janet's pulse fluttered as she went to the door and opened it. There stood Robert Crandall.

"Janet!"

The tone said all; there was no anger in it, only a reproof tender as a caress. She drew a long breath and tried to speak, but her words failed. Robert Crandall's heart was certainly very full of regret and pity as he looked in the pale face. He drew her into the parlor, and there her feelings made themselves way in passionate sobs and tears as she clung to him, in vehement joy and grief, this poor, lonely Janet!

Robert Crandall was deeply moved. He soothed her with words and soft caresses, as an elder brother would some *wayward, petted*, little sister, and at last the sobs and the

tears cleared themselves away, and Janet looked up and smiled in a sweet, tremulously, pleading way, that was more touching than words can describe.

"Oh, Robert, I feared you were angry with me!"

"It would be impossible for me to be that with you, little Janet; but do you know you have been giving me a great deal of anxiety and trouble; so much so that I could neither study nor sleep, and so at last I have come all this way to learn the truth from your own lips."

"I could not help it, Robert. I tried to come, but something held me back—it was impossible!"

He did not argue with her here.

"I want to know all about it. How any crotchet got into your foolish little head or heart, and who put it there? You will tell me all, Janet?"

"Everything."

And Janet did; commencing her relation with the conversation which had transpired betwixt her and Louise Kenneth; with all the doubts and fears, the uncertainty and pain which had followed it, until that last night when the thought of her dead mother, and the solemn conviction of her disapproval, had decided the matter; and as Janet talked, the color stole back to her cheeks, her voice grew earnest and steady, the fear which she had entertained seemed legitimate and right, and she no longer regarded herself as weak and wrong in resolving to leave Mrs. Kenneth's in a different fashion.

Robert Crandall perceived this, and it made him uneasy; he could not fairly meet Janet on the moral ground of her argument, and he evaded it by another issue.

"And so, Janet, you have concluded to give up your engagement because of some vague fear or doubt, utterly without foundation on your part?"

She hastened to reassure him on this point.

"Oh, no, Robert! I am ready; I shall be glad with my whole heart to go, only I want to do it fairly, openly, honorably!"

The words somehow slipped out of her lips. The late reaction had come; the strength and courage which, sooner or later, follows a great sacrifice for right's sake. Take care now, Robert Crandall! Her atmosphere is clearer, her intuitions are keener than ordinarily. The sophistries that will blind her here must be specious now. He resorted to

the plea which had proved so effectual in their last interview.

"I have made a mistake, it seems," said the grave, tenderly reproachful voice. "I believed this little sister of mine had perfect confidence in me, and when she knew that circumstances made it necessary for *my* sake that her departure should be kept a secret, she would trust me."

The tears strained themselves into the blue eyes at that voice; but just then, like a silvery chime, stole across the girl's memory those solemn words of Louise Kenneth's: "Though a man plead like an angel, do not trust him before your deepest convictions of right."

"Robert," she said, "tell me what these reasons are. I believe—I know they must be right ones, only when I come to see them myself they will remove all fear of doing wrong."

Her sweet, truthful eyes were on his face. How could he then and there make up some lie to suit the emergency? Her question went down to the core of the wrong he had been doing. It stung him, and there was irritation and haste in his answer.

"No, Janet! don't adjure me there. I can't tell you. There are reasons good and sufficient why I must keep this matter secret. Don't ride this hobby any longer!"

She drew a long breath of pain and disappointment for answer. The words were not so much as the voice, and that did not bear with it a conviction of truth to the soul of Janet Strong.

"Well, Janet," in a half-annoyed, half-impatient tone, "we must come to some settlement of the thing, and not waste words in this fashion. Just put me out of the question now—what would you best like to do about it?"

He had unconsciously put the inquiry against himself, while it was his intention to do it in a directly opposite way. In her simplicity, Janet answered:

"I should like to tell Mrs. Kenneth that I have made up my mind to leave, because I have found a new situation, and one which I shall like better."

"But don't you see, you foolish child, that the matter won't rest there? They will find out where you are going, and get some notion into their heads, and the first you'll know, all our acquaintance will leak out—you may depend on *that*."

He was off his guard; the petulant, annoyed tones were not those with which Robert Crandall usually addressed her.

"I don't think they would take such a deep interest in my matters. But if they *did* learn that you were my friend, and had served me about getting this place, surely there is nothing in that which either you or I need be ashamed of, or to which they could object."

"The devil there isn't!" said Robert Crandall.

The words were out before he stopped to think of them. Janet's look of amazement, well-nigh horror, recalled him to himself. Factory girl though she had been, servant though she was, Janet's habitual speech was as free from all coarse allusions, all slang expressions, as the truest lady's—a lady I mean by gift of God and cultivation of heart and soul.

"Robert Crandall!"

The words were hardly louder than a sigh, but there was in them something of pain, amazement, doubt, which it was not pleasant for the owner of that name to hear. He hastened to obviate the effect of his words; but somehow he felt as though he was losing ground and dignity before the girl.

"Forgive me, Janet. I really was unconscious of what I said. You see what alarm and anxiety in this thing have done for me."

"I see, Robert!" her face almost as sad as her voice.

"And don't you see, too, that my family could never be made to understand an intimacy like ours? They would be certain to imagine there was something wrong about it, which we, of course, know there is not, but it would be impossible to convince them."

Another long-drawn sigh, born of another doubt, stirring itself into life at his words.

"Come, Janet," and Robert Crandall drew near her with the old tenderness in his manner. "Put away from you all these miserable doubts which harass and perplex you. You know nothing about the world, little, innocent, lonely thing that you are. Trust yourself with me."

She looked up now, her face coming out into some new meaning, and her words clearing themselves out fervent with feeling.

"I know it is as you say, Robert. I am all alone in the

world—no father, no mother, no friend but you; wanting above all things to do what is right, and puzzled and troubled to know what that is; and knowing too, because I am so lonely and young and ignorant, that I must take the greater care of myself; that I must never do anything to be sorry for afterward, when it is too late to change, and there will be no one to save me from the consequences of any rash or foolish act; and therefore, standing all alone, I must take double care of my actions; I must always respect myself."

Janet felt almost inspired at this moment; she certainly spoke and looked above her usual self; there was a dignity in her manner, as there was a force in her words, which would not have misbecome a queen. They reacted whatsoever was generous or manly in the soul of Robert Crandall. He leaned toward Janet, and laid his hand on her shoulder, as she sat by his side on the sofa.

"Little Janet," he said, in a voice which his emotion made tender, "you are a good, noble girl, and I mean to be your true friend—always."

Her heart thrilled to his words. Her undefined doubts seemed to vanish away. And in that returning confidence she said to him:

"I will not ask you any more questions on this matter, Robert,—only if I was one of your own sisters, sitting here as I do now, orphaned and friendless, would you tell her to leave Mrs. Kenneth's just as you tell me, and would these private reasons of yours justify you for it? Think a moment, now, and answer me as you would if my dead mother were here to judge betwixt us two, and if you say 'Yes,' I will go."

She said this with a strange solemnity creeping into her voice and face, with those deep, truthful eyes searching away down into his; and when she paused, Robert Crandall was not bad enough to utter a lie that he felt would be a curse on all his future; his heart or his brain failed him.

And in that moment a wild impulse seized the young man to secure Janet at all hazards, to take her at once from his aunt's, send her to school for a year or two, and then make her his wife.

"Where could he ever find," he asked himself, "a sweeter, purer, truer one? He would marry her privately, and when it was done, his family might storm as much as they liked; give Janet social and educational advantages, and he would

match her against any of his lady sisters for grace, beauty, or intelligence; and it was his happiness, and not their pride that he would consult."

The words had almost passed his lips, and then he drew back. In that moment, when the better part of the man was uppermost, he dared not trust himself. It would be years before he could take Janet to wife, and in those years he might regret the promise into which the passion of his early youth had plunged him. If his honor was once pledged it could not be recalled. He did not know what circumstances might arise to make him sorely regret his rashness.

And perhaps with these noble thoughts mingled others less creditable to him. He had a young man's keen sense of ridicule, which often springs from lack of moral courage. He thought how his classmates would laugh over his "mesalliance," and the amazement and horror with which his family would say, "Our Robert has married Aunt Caroline's servant!"

Janet sat breathless, with her strained blue eyes watching the face of Robert Crandall. She could not tell all which went on in the heart beneath it, but she saw that he could not answer her question.

A great dread seized her. Her eyes were opened suddenly. It seemed as though all the anchors of her hope and faith were giving way. She covered her face with her hands, and the cry of her soul wailed through the room:

"Oh, Robert Crandall, Robert Crandall!"

It seemed to him that unconsciously her soul took vengeance on him with that cry. He had never felt so utterly humiliated in his life. He laid his hand on her arm, and his confession was stammered out, much like a culprit's at the bar, for he felt that moment as though he deserved almost any punishment for the sorrow he had wrought.

"Janet, I am a scoundrel, I know, and I cannot trust myself; but I never laid any plan to do you any harm beyond taking you away from here. I tell you this as before God. What I might have done afterward, tempted of the devil, when you were in my power, I cannot tell; but I speak the truth now: look up in my face and see it."

She did look up with her pallid, frightened face, and so far believed him; but the truth had come to her suddenly—a blow that her soul fairly staggered under, and it moaned out, as she rocked backward and forward, more to herself than to him:

"Oh, Robert Crandall, Robert Crandall, I thought you were noble, and manly, and true to the core ! I believed in you as I believed in my dead mother. In the whole world I thought there was no man to be compared to you in goodness ; and you would have wronged and deceived me, and now I can never trust any one again ; and I wish I was lying away out in the dark country hollow this very night by my mother's side!"

And so the poor distracted soul made its plaint over its lost idol. Every word was like a blow to him who listened. In that moment Robert Crandall almost cursed himself. His higher nature for the time showed him the essential shame and dishonor of the part he had acted.

He went to Janet at last and lifted her head from her hands, where she had buried it, and he said, in a voice of such penitence as no human ear had ever before heard from the lips of Robert Crandall :

"Janet, I acknowledge with sorrow and shame whatsoever wrong I have done in this matter. I cannot trust myself, therefore you have no right to trust me, and I believe you are doing what is right to refuse to go with me, much as I want you, and sorry as I shall probably be by to-morrow morning that I did not prevail upon you to do it. You can have no doubt that I have always held you in as profound respect as it is possible for me to any lady whom I have ever known, when you remember all our acquaintance ; and for the rest it seems to me that I would sooner cut off this right hand than do you any harm. Will you forgive me?"

There had been no anger in her heart, only a great loss and grief. She put out her hand.

"Yes, Robert."

He held it ; that other side of him half got the mastery again.

"Janet," he said, "now I have told you all, are you afraid to trust me—will you go with me?"

She was pendulous for a moment even then. The eyes, the voice of this man, the only one on earth she loved, were hard to resist. Then her will gathered itself up mightily. Her face settled into a resolution that she would hold to the death. She rose up.

"No. I will not go with you, Robert Crandall ; so help me God, I will not go with you!"

*Her voice swelled almost into a cry, for it came up to*

those words on a mighty effort. Then she sat down; a dry sob shivered and shivered through her. Neither spoke for awhile, and in that silence one of the city clocks struck midnight.

It was not safe for the young man to remain any longer. His cousins might return any moment. They looked at each other.

"I must take the morning train back," he said. "None of my family know I am here. I saw my cousins leave the house while I watched it, and I knew it was safe to come. You shall hear from me after I return. Good-by, Janet."

He drew her toward him.

"Good-by, Robert."

They looked at each other. There were tears in the eyes of both.

"Janet, you will not hate me? You will believe always that I loved you, better than even I myself knew until tonight?"

"I will not hate you—I will believe it, Robert."

He kissed the little, white, sad face, not trusting himself for any more words, and went out.

And as he left the steps, in the midst of his disappointment and pain, and both were keen and sharp, Robert Crandall was conscious of a sensation of relief, a throb of exultation. That awful specter of Repentance which he had sometimes caught glimpses of, stalking dimly through the future years, and casting its black shadow of memory and reproach over all his life, had vanished away.

And for Janet, she went with her white, strained face, and her heavy, heavy heart, up to her room that night. But rejoice, oh angels, and sing if you may, oh mother, some new song of gratitude where the white wings of the seraphs make "silver mists" through the eternal spaces, for your child is saved, saved, SAVED!

And for Janet—back once more into the old groove in which her life was set before Robert Crandall came across it, the old, lonely, desolate, baffled days, the hunger at her heart made keener for the banquet to which she had gone up a little while before, the contrast between the gray, chilly life, made stronger for the sweet fragrance and color which had preceded them,—all this Janet struggled with; but such a crisis lived through, such a temptation conquered, did not leave her as it found her. In her inmost soul she never

regretted the decision of that night. Courage and strength, and the deeper insight that comes of evil resisted, were given her.

And new, hungry aspirations followed, which were the natural result of her intimacy with Robert Crandall. She fretted sorely against her present position. She covenanted with herself to leave it; and here Janet proved the true stamina of her nature, by not wasting herself in vain longings, and regrets, and dissatisfaction with her lot. All these took a definite, practical form.

She had no friends to apply to for counsel or assistance in this matter. There was Robert Crandall—but the poor, wounded heart put away this thought. She should not dare to trust him, although he had written her several times letters, kind and tender as his former ones, and she had replied briefly and gravely to these. But it was always a great pain to do this. She wanted to get away where she could never hear from him again, and he should not know whether she were living or dead.

So Janet made her plans unassisted, unless of angels; her wardrobe was so well supplied now that it would last her a year, and she was resolved to go back to the old factory town which she had left, and try and find some place in its vicinity where she could work for her board, and attend the district school. She would study very diligently for a year, doing all that was in her power for her general improvement, and at the end of that period it was possible that she might be advanced enough to take charge of an infant school, or obtain some other position. So reasoned Janet—so she acted. She remained with Mrs. Kenneth for nearly three months after her last interview with Robert Crandall, carefully hoarding up her small wages, and then she left, a little before his vacation, not daring to trust either him or herself with another meeting.

Mrs. Kenneth was very kind,—indeed, she had been so in a marked degree ever since her daughter's illness. She regretted to part with the girl for various reasons, and made many inquiries about her future plans and destination. But Janet revealed as little of these as possible, for she wished nothing of her future to reach the ears of Robert Crandall. She simply informed Mrs. Kenneth that she was intending to visit some acquaintances in her native town, but she should not remain there, neither had she decided where she should go.

There was a dignity in Janet's answer which, servant as she was, baffled the lady's curiosity. She got nothing further out of her.

The week after Janet's departure Louise Kenneth returned, quite restored in health. She was greatly surprised at Janet's departure, and made many inquiries respecting her destination, but her mother could give her little satisfaction. Robert Crandall happened to hear the topic discussed between the mother and daughter on the first afternoon that he passed at his aunt's, after his return home in vacation; but neither of the ladies suspected the intent eagerness with which he drank in every word, nor the bitterness with which he thought, "I have lost my little Janet!"

## CHAPTER IV.

IT is nightfall in November, in a quiet old country village that leans to the sea. The landscape has a certain dreary picturesqueness in it, as it lies cold and lowering under the thick, gray-white clouds. The wind blows in the mists from the sea—mists that bring a sharp, stinging chill with them. The meadows and the fields and the deep frill of grass by the roadside are all faded—wind and rain have quite worn out the summer's robe everywhere. In the distance the hills which guard the old, rambling village that leans to the sea, stand up stern, dreary, defiant—their branches shorn, their foreheads bare, waiting for the winter, wrapped in garments of storm and darkness, to pass by.

This old New England village was famous for its fine scenery; and the view from that rising ground, just beyond the brown mill, was one of the finest for miles around.

Far off on the left was the sea, making a blue curve distinct from the blue of the horizon, and nearer were green swells of woodland and pretty clusters of white houses, and homely old homesteads and country roads, which seemed like a saffron-colored cord winding over a dead green ground, and little streams making silver fringes here and there,—altogether an enchanting picture in the summer.

And the girl, or young woman she is now, standing on that bit of rising ground behind the mill, listens to the angry riot of the waters, swelled by the recent rain, as they lash and tear themselves along the banks.

She has stood there many times; feasted her eyes, gladdened her soul on that same scene when it had on its garments of praise and beauty. She feels the contrast now. Some look of pain and loss blurs her eyes and saddens her face for a moment. There she stands, a young, slender woman, all in gray and brown, which, plain as they are, have some fine harmony of tints that give her an appearance of being better dressed than she really is.

*This girl has a remarkably attractive face. Some writer*

says, quaintly, and I am inclined to believe it, that "if any woman can look pretty at times, she ought to be content."

But it seems that this girl must do that always with those delicate features, that soft, clear complexion, those deep, bright eyes, and the red line of her lips, and the small roses in her cheeks stung into unusual bloom by the wind.

This girl, standing by the old mill, and gazing with hungry eyes over the village of Woodleaf, darkening in the mists and the night, is Janet Strong, with her life widened by six years. They have done a great deal for her. They have made her in face and figure all, and perhaps more than her childhood promised. They have brought some sharp trials, and constant struggling. It must naturally be so with one who has neither friends nor fortune in the world, nobody in short to whom to look for aid in any emergency.

But Janet had a strong purpose, a persistent will, and, thanks to her early country life, good health. After she left Mrs. Kenneth's, she was not long in obtaining a situation in an adjoining town, where she worked for her board and attended the district school for a couple of years, concentrating all her energies of soul and body on this one object of mental improvement. Such a girl would be likely to make a bright scholar. Janet did, and at the end of two years the district school teacher fell ill, and her mantle dropped on Janet. She had worn it four years. The work was arduous, and the salary in that out-of-the-way village small enough.

But then she was independent. What a long breath of joy she drew over that thought when she first realized all it meant! She could earn her board and clothes. This, with a few books, and the yearly prizes for her scholars, was about all the salary allowed. But with this the poor girl felt like a princess the first year.

Gradually, however, the feeling wore off, and another, or rather a host of others came to take their places, some of them very nearly related to those old, aching, clamorous ones she had so often experienced.

But she kept on at her work, studying still to improve herself, and perhaps hardly guessing how much she did grow in all respects, in that narrow and comparatively barren sphere of her labors. Of course the position of district school teacher gave Janet an entré into all the best families; ~~but~~ Woodleaf was a drowsy, agricultural village, and among

the farmers' wives she never found one a whit beyond herself in social cultivation or intelligence, certainly she never found among them any glimpse of a life like that which she had seen at Mrs. Kenneth's. She had grown now to think of that time without any of the old, sore pain at her heart. These years had even drawn a kindly veil betwixt her and the memory of Robert Crandall, though it was a long, long time before this could be.

He had been the ideal of Janet's youth. No one ever supplanted for a moment his place in her memory, and the contrast betwixt him and all the men she met subsequently, would not be likely to depreciate him in her estimation. Then, too, it had this good effect. Those few weeks' association with a man of so much cultivation as Robert Crandall, had refined her taste and elevated her ideals.

Some of the young farmers in the neighborhood, attracted by Janet's face, made a good many efforts to cultivate her society, but unconsciously to the girl herself, there was some fine dignity or reserve about her which effectually prevented her rustic suitors from making further advances.

Not that her heart was still engrossed by Robert Crandall. Janet was of a bright, healthy, recuperative nature, and although her affections had certainly suffered a terrible wrench at the time she left Robert Crandall, they had not struck their roots down to the spring of her life.

She was little more than a child then, although one evening did almost make a woman of her. Her thoughts slid back to that time now, for there had been an unusual soreness, and despondency among them all day.

She had grown quite tired of the sight of the little red school-house, with its great, bare room, and the gaunt benches and desks. Her fate had seemed to darken around her, close, barren, relentless. She had said to herself that her youth was baffled and defeated on every side, that her future stretched away down the years, as the bare gray reach by the sea, with no shade of tree nor light of flowers. She shivered as she looked down the road of her life, and saw the solitary figure, bearing the same burdens, going through the same unvarying round of toil.

And after a day in this frame of mind Janet Strong had paused behind the mill to look at the landscape whose general tone harmonized too closely with her morbid feelings: *and it was well just then, when the lights of hope were*

darkened at the windows of her soul, and the anchors of her faith seemed all to have given way, it was well that Janet's thoughts went back to that great danger and crisis of her life. Here was a real, tangible evil from which she had been delivered. There, when her feet had stood on the brink of a precipice so fearful that she shuddered at the very thought of it, a Hand had been reached out to lead her away.

Janet never remembered that time without feeling that the love and the care were still about her life, that it was watched over and remembered by One who would not forget her in her need and loneliness.

Dear reader, there are many who have walked, it may be unconsciously, in the shadow of some awful temptation, of some mistake or evil which might have wrecked their lives; and from this, in some blessed moment, they have been delivered. The flame has not so much as scorched their garments, the last fatal step over the precipice has not been taken; and remembering *that* time, surely these have cause for a life of gladness, and gratitude, and charity.

The mists cleared up from Janet's soul as she thought. A new feeling of humility and faith stole into her soul as the wind drove up from the pine woods some faint fragrance. She turned and walked rapidly down the hill with some new hope and comfort at her heart. She did not suspect that while she stood on the hill, too absorbed to notice any event transpiring about her, that a carriage had passed with a solitary occupant, whose attention had been attracted to the still figure on the hill long before he reached it.

And his curiosity being excited by Janet's attitude, the gentleman had managed to get a view of her face as he drove slowly past. He saw it all, the parted lips, red as the clusters of barberries which hung thick on the bushes in the low pastures, the cheeks stung into unnatural bloom by the sea wind, and the blue eyes with the absorbed, restrained expression in them which always denotes secret pain.

This gentleman had a keen appreciation of beauty, and just then Janet's was brought out to peculiar advantage, against the background of those wan clouds and the chill, desolate earth. There was a singular picturesqueness in her attitude too. Altogether the gentleman was struck with it, in a way that must certainly have flattered the girl had she suspected it, but she did not, and hurried on with a little shiver toward her home.

## C H A P T E R V.

THE old stone mansion occupied a commanding site in the outskirts of the village. Its east windows looked to the sea, and its west to the mountains; and the ample grounds which suited the stately, but by no means ostentatious home in their midst, were laid out with a rare degree of taste. Hedges of buckthorn inclosed the whole, and there were sloping lawns, with brave old horse-chestnuts and cedars, whose deep green seemed like a memory of the lost summer, thrilling the wintry air; and gravel walks that gleamed in the distance like a silver gray overshot in the faded grass; and the two great stone lions that flanked the steps kept their grim wardership over grounds and dwelling.

The sitting room on this especial night was a glow of warmth, and color, and light. Yet there was no profusion or ostentation anywhere. A few choice landscapes flamed their living beauty along the walls, and the bright sea-coal fire deluged the room with a rich maroon glow, in wonderful contrast with the cold and pallor outside.

"Well, Evelyn, this *is* pleasant to a man after a ride of ten miles on such a day!" and the speaker, in Cashmere dressing-gown and embroidered slippers, settled himself down in his ample arm-chair.

"I should fancy it must be an agreeable contrast. Oh, Guy, you dear creature, how tedious and dreadful it must have been!"

The lady's voice interpreted herself, with its soft, pliant, undeveloped tones; I mean undeveloped in all high senses of experience, sympathy, reflection. It was girlish, and lacked character, which, however, might be latent in the possessor, and yet it was a very pleasant voice to hear, gliding softly along its sibilants.

"It was all that and something else, Evelyn. You see I was wise in my refusal, after all, to take the ride alone."

*The small, restless head, that had a thousand pretty tricks of motion, was poised steadily now.*

"I do not like wise people," said the lady; for she was a wife, little as she looked or acted the name. "I like people that live out their impulses, their fancies, their humors. I shall never make a wise woman. I was never cut out in that pattern."

"I suspect not!" smiling down on the small lady as she sat at his feet in an attitude of most bewitching grace, and the firelight at play in her fine gold hair.

Mrs. Humphreys was hardly twenty-one now, and she did not look her years. A mere child she was still, with a face which won you to love it, as children's faces do, for their sweetness and simplicity. She was of the golden-haired, blue eyed, peach-bloom type, only there was vivacity and brightness enough about her to relieve her from any reproach of insipidity in face or manner. There was no lack of intelligence either, and she had strong capacities for good or evil; but she was one of those natures that ripen late, and living now her pretty, sparkling, surface life, into which the coming years would plow deep, finding what sort of soil lay beneath. Evelyn Humphreys had a history in no-wise peculiar. It is that of thousands of the more favored of her sex—favored after all, it may be, only in a narrow and temporary sense. She was a spoiled child; the only and idolized daughter of parents whose wealth and taste enabled them to surround her with every grace and luxury of life. Then she seemed especially made for sheltering, and petting,—the sweet, dainty, sparkling little creature, and bloomed into her graceful, fascinating womanhood, with about as much realization of its griefs and faiths, its great, sanctifying joys and sorrows, as the canaries who sang her eyes open every morning.

And at this time, Guy Humphreys' path and hers crossed each other. He was half a dozen years her senior, a man of fine cultivation, and of generous nature. But he too had none of that seasoning and toughening which comes of hard and brave wrestling with life. His parents had died in his boyhood, he was the heir of considerable wealth, he was left to the guardianship of a doting bachelor uncle, he had passed through college most creditably, and had traveled two years abroad, and then, in an indolent, intermittent fashion, set about studying for his profession.

» Guy Humphreys certainly did not find in Evelyn Win-

chester his ideal woman, for he had one, and she combined all lovable qualities of heart with all noble ones of mind, but he was not the less enchanted with this most bewitching little fairy.

There was no stormy courtship here. Not the faintest ripple of disapproval stirred its smooth waters. Guy had just those qualities of person, and all those chivalric graces of manner, which are most likely to attract the fancies of a girl like Evelyn; and he had those more solid adjuncts of wealth, character, position, which would turn the scales in his favor with her parents.

So the suit of Guy Humphreys prospered, and with joyous bridal festival, and costly gifts, and marriage settlements, he took to wife the pretty, spoiled child, Evelyn Winchester.

For nearly two years things had gone smoothly as marriage bells with the wedded pair. Both were naturally good-natured, if matters moved without especial jarring, which is more than can be said of a great many people; both believed themselves deeply in love with the other, and taking into consideration the character of each, their married life had thus far quite fulfilled its expectations.

In less than two years after his nephew's marriage, the uncle of Guy Humphreys found it necessary to go abroad for a year, and proposed to the young couple that they should install themselves during his absence at the old stone mansion in Woodleaf, where he passed much of his time. The novelty of the thing at once attracted Evelyn Humphreys. The prospect of being mistress of her own house seemed to bring with it a wonderful accession of dignity; and as Guy rather favored the plan, she had her own way, coaxing and arguing away with more or less pretty sophistries, all of her parents' objections and fears to this new arrangement.

They concluded that, accustomed as she was to the excitement and gayety of the city, she would sicken with ennui in the country before the winter was over, and after the novelty of the new life had worn off she would be glad enough to return home. So they indulged all her pretty zeal on this occasion, and early in the autumn Guy Humphreys brought his young wife to Woodleaf.

Evelyn's delight in her new home did not wear off as soon as her parents expected. She really had a genuine taste for

country scenery, and as the housekeeper quite absorbed all domestic care and responsibility, Mrs. Humphreys experienced a new pleasure and sense of importance, in being ostensible mistress of her own household.

In the course of a few weeks a new inmate was added to the family, in a daughter of a favorite cousin of Guy's, who had been his almost inseparable companion in his boyhood.

He was of a generous, fine-souled, but rash, immethodical nature; had married young, wrecked most of his property, which was not large, in his first ventures in business, and then gone South with his young wife and child to retrieve his fortunes.

The climate was not kind to the young mother, and in a little while she faded and died; her husband followed her, after struggling through a few years, and on his death-bed he dictated a touching appeal to the brother of his boyhood, confiding his helpless little daughter to his cousin's love and protection, and imploring him to take the place of her dead father to his child.

Guy Humphreys' was not the heart to resist an appeal like that. The child was sent for without delay, and Maude Woolcott, a little timid, bewildered child of six years, reached the new home where welcome, and care, and tenderness were lavished on her. Mrs. Humphreys took a fancy to the child. Indeed Guy had taken good care that his wife's interest and pity should be awakened in behalf of his small relative before her arrival; so she was petted and indulged between the two quite as much as was likely to prove beneficial to her in any respect.

"Did you have any adventures during your ride?" asked Mrs. Humphreys, as she sat before the fire waiting for the supper bell, for they had old-fashioned hours in the country. "You always meet with something funny, or marvelous, or out of the way!"

"Well, this ride was an exception. I never in the course of my experience had a barer, blander nine miles back and forth than this one. I scarcely met a person on the road, coming or going, except that solitary figure in gray and brown on the hill."

"Was it a man's or woman's, Guy?" asked Evelyn, with a show of idle curiosity.

"A woman's, my dear; young, and remarkably pretty at

that. She first attracted my attention long before I reached her, as she stood there on that bit of elevated ground just behind the old mill, where we stopped our carriage the other day to get the view."

"What was she doing there?" asked Evelyn, making pictures out of the coals, which were now a bed of fiery blossoms.

"That's what puzzled me. There she stood, still as a statue, her figure carved out with strange picturesqueness against the somber background of sky and earth. I fancy she was looking at the landscape, but *that* was blurred all over with mists, and dark, and lowering with night and age—not one attractive feature in it."

"Did you see her, Guy?" pursuing her questions, because she did not at that moment happen to have anything else to talk about.

"Yes; as I rode by; although I am certain the solitary figure did not see me, so absorbed was she. But it was a remarkably pretty face, with well-cut features, and small roses in the cheeks, and lips that were like the reddest of those coals down there. The eyes were blue, not afloat in sunbeams and laughter like yours, Evelyn, but with some sadness or repression in them."

"How closely you must have watched her! Quite too much so, indeed, for a married man!" and out of the arch lips flickered a little, bright laugh, very pleasant to hear.

Guy laughed too. Evelyn's manner always gave a peculiar point to her words, making them seem much more than they really were.

"It did not strike me in that light at the time," he said. "I *should* like to know who that girl was, or what she was thinking of."

"Oh, it's just struck me, it must have been Miss Strong, the district school teacher," said Mrs. Dean, the house-keeper, who had entered the room during the latter part of the conversation, and listened to it with some interest. "I saw her at meeting the other Sunday, and inquired her out. I know she's the person, from your description."

"Does she teach that crowd of tow-headed boys and girls who burst out from that little old red shell just beyond the creek?"

"Yes; she must have a hard time of it with such a coarse, *unruly set*," volunteered Mrs. Dean.

"I should think so. No wonder she looked absorbed and troubled. She has my sympathy."

"How I wish I could see her!" chimed in Mrs. Humphreys, who was in the habit of idle whims of this kind.

"I don't see the way, my dear, unless you send Maude to the district school. I suppose you would hardly like to place her in the midst of such an uncouth, obstreperous set, even to gratify your curiosity to see the teacher?"

"Of course I shouldn't, Guy. One of these days Maude must have a governess. She must be an accomplished young lady, just as if she was our very own."

Guy Humphreys bent forward and kissed his young wife, fervently. He was always extremely gratified when she exhibited any especial solicitude for Maude's welfare, for he well knew there were plenty of women in the world who would not have received the little orphan to her heart and home as Mrs. Humphreys had done. Then the next moment he slapped her smartly on the shoulder:

"That's a capital idea, Evelyn! How did it find its way into your little cranium? We can try the district school teacher for this office of governess to Maude."

"That would be very nice, only I don't believe she could teach Italian and French, and, as I said, Maude must be accomplished."

"Nonsense! there's time enough for that, and I expect to take both of you to Paris with me some day. What she wants now is a good sound English foundation, and that, I'll be bound, this girl could furnish her."

"Well then, Guy, supposing you call around some time to-morrow and have a talk with the teacher? You're not obliged to take her, you know, if she doesn't wear on acquaintance; but it will make the way clear for me to get a look at her, which may be all I shall want."

"Suppose you go with me and judge for yourself. We'll kill both the birds with one stone?"

Just then the tea bell rang. The sound of it banished for the time all thoughts of the district school teacher from the mind of Guy Humphreys and his wife, as he rose up and gave the lady his arm.

But on what apparently very small hinges move the great events of our destiny! That idle whim of curiosity on the part of Mrs. Evelyn Humphreys, was to form a great turning point in the life and fate of Janet Strong.

## CHAPTER VI.

THE next day was clear, and warm for the season, as though a little lost sunshine of the summer spilled itself over the crisp, sodden earth, and it glowed and brightened under it as aged faces do sometimes under the memories of their lost youth.

The district school teacher was neither poet nor artist, but as she went past the old brown mill, with the tired feeling which she always carried away from the last half of her day's work, her thoughts of the year and the day were much what I have written.

But when she reached the wide old farm-house where she boarded, all such fancies were effectually put to flight by the farmer's wife, who met her at the door, her face full of some important mystery, saying:

"I'm so glad you've come! What do you think's happened—Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys have been in the parlor for the last fifteen minutes waiting for you!"

"For me! for me!" murmured the bewildered school teacher. "There must be some mistake!"

She had occasionally heard the name of the great people of the village, for they formed, of course, one of the principal topics which stirred the dead calm of Woodleaf society, but she had never met with a member of the family, excepting Guy's uncle, whose drives had occasionally crossed her walks, but with whom she had never exchanged a word.

"No, there isn't any mistake," stoutly affirmed the farmer's excited wife. "I made sure on that head. It's Miss Strong, the village school teacher, they're after!"

Janet hurried up to her room like one in a dream, slipped off her hat and shawl, smoothed her hair, made some little improvements in the details of her dress, and then went down into the parlor.

The gentleman and lady sitting there looked at her with a good deal of polite curiosity as she entered, and the former rose up and presented himself and his wife, with a tone

and air of breeding which at once carried Janet back to Robert Crandall.

"You will excuse us for this unceremonious visit, and for our abrupt fashion of making known its errand? Mrs. Humphreys and myself are anxious to obtain, without delay, a governess for a relative of ours, a little adopted niece, a child who needs instruction in the English branches."

"And," subjoined Mrs. Humphreys, who thought it quite becoming her position and dignity to have a voice in the matter, "we heard of you through our housekeeper, Mrs. Dean, and thought you might find it more agreeable to have a single scholar than fifty of them—at least there would be no harm in asking?"

Janet listened to the words. She turned her gaze from the gentleman to the fair and dainty lady, in her wrappings of silk and velvet, by his side—the whole thing bewildered her. She passed her hand across her face, and then looked up again, with her blue eyes in a blank amazement, and she said, quite as much to herself as to her hearers:

"Surely, I must be dreaming!"

"I don't wonder you think so, Miss Strong!" said Evelyn Humphreys, and her laugh twittered out gayly. "It's enough to turn one's wits to come upon you in this fashion; but really we are quite in earnest in the matter of wanting a governess for Maude, and she is a bright, loving little thing, who won't give you much trouble, and I fancy you won't find us very disagreeable people to live with."

So at last Janet began to realize that all this was something beside a dream; but her first consciousness in the matter was a feeling of utter incompetency for the position offered her. She must put aside this great, good gift, which transcended all that she had ever dared to hope for. Janet knew nothing of policy in business matters, and in this case her simplicity availed her most.

"You have done me a great honor in offering me this situation, and I am not insensible of it, but I must tell you, with sorrow, that I am entirely unqualified for it. I know nothing of music, or French, or any of the modern accomplishments. I have had largely to teach myself, and am capable of taking the charge of a district school where only the most ordinary branches are taught."

"And that's really all we want for Maude. As for music and French, and those things, there'll be time enough, and

she's quite behind school-girls of her age, having passed all her life in South America, where it's too warm, or the people are too lazy, to study."

"How eager and sensible the little lady does talk!" thought Guy Humphreys, who was vastly amused at the importance she assumed in this interview.

There was a lurking gleam of fun in his eyes, which neutralized the extreme gravity of his tones, as he said:

"I was not aware until this moment, Mrs. Humphreys, that you had investigated so thoroughly the social and educational habits of South America!"

Evelyn leaned back in her chair and laughed merrily.

"That is the way, Miss Strong, in which he always treats my opinions on any serious subject. But I'm right in this one, for all that!"

"I didn't dispute it, my dear! I only wondered where you had attained such a degree of information." Then he turned to Janet, who had been considerably amused with all this. "But, to return to the matter in hand, I assure you, you need have no scruples with regard to your qualifications for teaching our little girl. She wants to learn just what your scholars in the school over there do—how to read and write and spell, with the multiplication table, and the first principles of geography. We can get her masters for the ornamental branches as soon as it is necessary. So, if this is your only scruple, don't let it stand in your way for a moment."

"It is my only one, Mr. Humphreys," answered Janet, who had now regained her self-possession. "I need not tell you how glad I must be to accept your offer, or that, if you intrust your niece to my care, I shall do the best that lies in my power for her instruction."

"Then it is a bargain, I think. Now about the salary. What will satisfy you for the year?"

"I have not the slightest idea what my services will be worth to you. You will satisfy me by settling that," she answered.

The gentleman named a sum which far exceeded her expectations. It was more than double the amount which she received as district school teacher. All collateral matters were easily adjusted. Janet feared there might be some difficulty in getting the committee to provide another teacher before the close of the term, but Mr. Humphreys

said he could manage that, in a tone which left no doubt as to his faith in his own powers of convincing that august body, and it was settled before he left that Janet should, on the following week, take up her home in the Humphreys' mansion on the hill.

"Oh, isn't she pretty, Guy! I'm certain that I shall like her," said Mrs. Humphreys, as her husband handed her into the carriage.

But for Janet—she went straight to her room, the farmer's curious wife having to content herself as she best could, with the teacher's promise of relating all which had transpired during the interview: and sinking down on her knees by the bedside, she sobbed out her thanks to God for the new gift He had sent her. And so it was that Janet Strong took her new fortune.

"Come here, Maude! I want to tell you about the new governess you're to have next week," said Guy Humphreys to the little girl, as she entered the room to bid him and Mrs. Humphreys good night.

The little orphan rubbed her fingers into her sleepy brown eyes, and shook her short curls decidedly.

"I don't like governesses! They're always old and cross and ugly, like duennas. The little English girl I loved in South America told me so, and she knew, for she had one in London!"

"Oh, but this lady is of a different type altogether!" answered Guy, amused at the child's picture of her typical governess. "She's young and very pretty, and will be very kind, and teach you a great many nice things that you will like to learn."

"I shan't like to learn anything! I'd rather play with you and Aunt Evelyn. It's a great deal nicer than studying!" persisted the child.

And so, finding that the prejudice had taken deep root in her mind, Guy desisted from further remark on the subject, certain that when the little girl saw her new governess, all these preconceived notions would be put to flight. The event proved his wisdom.

The Woodleaf committee was easily induced by Guy's representations to provide another teacher for the red schoolhouse; and at the appointed time, Janet made her advent at the stone mansion, and her shy, but bright-faced little pupil, was reluctantly led in to see her.

"She is only a little younger than I, when I was left fatherless and motherless too!" thought Janet, and this gave some new softness to her face and voice, as she asked, "Will you come and let me see you, my child?" and Maude went, with her eyes wide and searching on her new teacher's face.

Mr. Humphreys watched the meeting with a good deal of interest.

"There, Maude! didn't I tell you the truth? Don't you think you will like Miss Strong, after all?"

"Yes, I think I shall, Uncle Guy," was the child's decided answer, and she put up her mouth for a kiss.

What a change to Janet Strong, from the farm-house, with its coarse, narrow, cramped life, to this charmed one in the stone mansion! Her very chamber, with its soft colors and luxurious furniture, was fairly an inspiration; and then she had the beauty of pictures, the inspiration of music, the graces and stimulants of a refined social life about her.

It was surprising that she sank into it so easily; but Janet Strong had some inward grace which readily shaped itself into outward harmony, and she very easily adjusted herself to these new conditions. It often at first suggested Mrs. Kenneth's to her, only her position now was totally unlike the one she occupied there.

Mrs. Humphreys, like all undisciplined, impulsive natures, took vehement likes and dislikes, and she had conceived a strong fancy for Janet, and as the two were thrown much into each other's society in their country home, Mrs. Humphreys made a confidant of Janet, and treated her in all respects like an equal.

Then, there was a large library, in whose contents the young governess fed her half-starved mind, and Maude was not the only one who made surprising leaps in knowledge. Mr. Humphreys too was greatly interested in his young governess. She was unlike any woman he had ever met, for Janet's necessary self-dependence had wrought in her strength and solidity of character; and yet, sensible as she was, there was a peculiar simplicity and frankness about her.

"She was worth a dozen ordinary women," he often remarked to his wife, who had a good-natured pleasure in repeating this bit of flattery to the individual who was the subject of it.

## CHAPTER VII.

SIX months had passed. You can form some conception of what they must have been to this Janet Strong, lifted suddenly out of the barrenness and toil of her past, into this new, warm, luxurious present.

In her case, of course, happiness was greatly heightened and intensified by contrast. Out from the background of hard and dreary years, stood these days in their fullness of light and beauty, like some wonderful romance, and she walked amid them for awhile like one in a dream, half afraid the good was too vast and sudden to be real.

Of course this feeling of novelty, this delicious sense of change and enjoyment, must wear itself out after a time. Life has no circumstances, or positions, which sooner or later do not develop their peculiar trials, their responsibilities, which cannot be shirked, their relations and duties which must be endured and fulfilled.

But Janet had not come to these yet, and it was natural, if, perhaps not wisest, that she should fancy this new life into whose soft lap she had fallen should last forever; that her days should go singing down its streams, that its banks should always lift their sheets of bloom on either side of her, and that little bark of hers need no one to stand at the helm, for the years would never bring it again out into the broad sea, where the storms should walk in their wrath and darkness.

She expected in some vague sense—we are all so apt to do that—that the future would redeem that heavy debt of loss and denial which her childhood and youth owed to her.

She was not indolent now; all her faculties were awake, stimulated by the new tributaries which flowed into and enlarged her existence. Music, pictures, books, cultivated society—all that these could give her she drank in greedily.

When nature sets out to make a lady, it takes a good deal of hard and stubborn circumstance to thwart her. Janet

Strong proved this in a variety of ways, and one was the eagerness with which she availed herself of her present opportunities, seeking growth and improvement amid these new social and intellectual influences.

To Guy Humphreys and his wife there was always a slight but perpetual mystery about their governess. Thoroughly well-bred as were these two, and fastidious, both by nature and education, it was certainly remarkable that Janet, thrown with them constantly as she was, hardly ever transgressed any canon of etiquette; her intuitions were so delicate, her observations so acute, that even in the eyes of these people, they fairly stood her in the stead of cultivation, or experience.

So she always carried to them something of the interest and mystery of a heroine. Neither this man nor woman could comprehend how a young girl, without advantages of family, fortune, or cultivation, could make of herself what Janet had, little imagining how much they themselves were contributing to the result.

The young governess perhaps had some vague intuition, which did not develop itself into consciousness, of the attitude in which she stood toward Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys; at all events, she never indulged them with the details of her history, and this silence, entirely removed from all affection on Janet's part, was certainly more dignified, and helped to maintain her position in the eyes of both Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys.

Do not mistake me here. She made no attempt to elevate herself in the eyes of these two by hinting that her past was different, or better than it was; she made no capital out of their interest or curiosity, and she said to them:

"I am an orphan, without fortune or a congenial friend in the world. I have experienced many privations, and struggled up to this time through many bitter trials, and if I am worthy of your, or anybody's regard, or ever accomplish anything, I shall owe it to nobody, but God, and myself, unless, it may be, to the mother who left her last kiss on my lips before I had seen my twelfth birthday."

This was about all Janet vouchsafed of her life, all certainly her employers had a right to ask, and although Evelyn Humphreys did manifest sometimes a little natural curiosity on this subject, she was quite too well-bred to push her inquiries so far as to embarrass her governess.

"I am sure," she said, occasionally, to her husband, "that Miss Janet has seen good society, although she never suggests it. It would be quite impossible for her to appear as she does, if she'd always lived in this out-of-the-way old town, with only coarse, uncultivated people about her."

"It would hardly be possible, I think," Mr. Humphreys would answer, laying down his paper, for he usually manifested more interest when Janet was the subject of his wife's indolent gossip, than he did when she talked of her other friends.

"There's no doubt about it, Guy, that there's some great mystery about our governess."

"Well, whatever it is, you may be sure, Evelyn, she has no reason to be ashamed of it. That face of hers will stand witness for her fidelity anywhere."

"Of course it would, Guy! I have as much faith in Miss Janet, in every respect, as I have in any woman in the world, and every day I like her better."

And so the harmless criticisms ebbed and flowed about the young girl; and the winter went over her, and the spring dawned and ripened into May, and brought her down to this afternoon, of which I was about to tell, when I commenced this chapter.

It was somewhere in the middle of May, and the earth was full of the great, new joy of its resurrection. The air was spiced with the scent of apple-blossoms and springing grass. The sunshine poured its bright warmth everywhere, touching all things into fullness of life, and beauty, and gladness.

And after the day's lessons were over, Janet Strong came out of the house, and walked among the paths which sloped and circled down to the little pond. She had no definite aim in this walk, only the warmth and life outside called to her, and she would have followed the path had it led anywhere else.

The gladness of sky and earth entered into all the open doors of this girl's soul, and glowed outward in her face again, lifting it into new light, and glow. There was a flounce of daintily trained shrubbery all along the bank of this pond, broken in one place where two or three steps went down into the stream, and close by these the boat was moored which had been laid up all winter, and which the *gardener had brought out that very day.*

So Janet Strong stood still and watched the pretty row-boat softly rocking on the water. She held her little sun hat in her hands. Perhaps, never in her whole life had she herself looked quite so pretty as she did standing there on the bank of the pond, amid the sunshine and the dark fringe of shrubbery.

Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys had been absent for a couple of days, visiting some friends thirty miles off, and were not expected home for a couple more.

"I never expected to be so happy as this in my life!" murmured Janet, her memory slipping away down into other springs, not like this one.

"I am heartily glad to hear you say that, Miss Janet!" said a voice at her side.

She started, and there was Guy Humphreys standing by her. It was very natural that the young girl should blush with surprise and embarrassment at being overheard—whether the blushes had root in any deeper emotion, Janet could not herself have told at that moment, but blushes were certainly becoming to her.

"Mr. Humphreys—is it possible—I thought you were in Stoneham!" she faltered.

"I suppose so, but I had an errand into the adjoining town, and fearing that you might be lonely, I concluded to run over and see how it fared with you."

It certainly indicated a great degree of solicitude on the part of the gentleman, to ride twenty-five miles and back, merely to assure himself of his governess's comfort, when the housekeeper and the servants had this in especial charge! Janet's face and voice showed she felt it.

"Thank you, Mr. Humphreys! You have hardly allowed me to give any limit to your kindness and care, but this new proof of it is greater than even I could have imagined."

"You have a wonderful faculty of turning pretty compliments, Miss Janet. I am a man, and awkward of speech like the rest of my sex, so I must express my sense of your pretty speech in the most delicate way I can;" and he bent down and kissed softly the half-drooping forehead of Janet Strong.

"Oh, Mr. Humphreys, you should not!" she faltered, with a little, struggling, half-deprecatory gesture, in which, however, was no anger.

"*Perhaps not; but you shouldn't have answered me so*

sweetly that I could not express my gratitude in a less grateful way!"

She did not reply; she stood still in a pretty confusion of face, which was as attractive as the most accomplished coquette's, though Janet was not one.

Then Mr. Humphreys led the conversation into other channels; of the weather, and the grounds, and Maude's progress in her studies; and at last the gardener came along, and after his surprise at seeing his young master was over, he took them both around to the beds of crocuses and hyacinths, which had opened during the last three days in a great surf of gold and purple bloom.

And here Maude, watching from the front windows, described them. In a moment the child was out of the front door, and bounding down the walk.

"Uncle Guy! Uncle Guy! where in the world did you come from?"

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"From Stoneham, my little girl!"

"But what made you come back without Aunt Evelyn?"

"Oh! I had several matters, which your small head wouldn't contain, to see about; such as giving the gardener some suggestions, learning whether I'd had any important telegrams or letters from the city, etc.!"

Maude was easily satisfied; but there was a pleased gleam in the eyes of Janet Strong. She knew that none of these ostensible reasons had brought Mr. Humphreys home, and of all the world, she only knew it.

They all went up to the house together, chatting over ordinary matters; and here the gentleman was persuaded by the housekeeper to remain to supper, and was obliged to start away the moment that was over. Janet and Maude accompanied him to the door, as was natural. He kissed the little girl, and then sent her off to find a pamphlet which he had inadvertently left on the hall table, and during the brief interval in which the child was gone, he took leave of his governess in a way that—would not have pleased his wife Evelyn, and she was not naturally a jealous woman.

Jauet watched with Maude the carriage out of sight, and then ran up to her room, in a flutter of pleased excitement. Now I am not painting any faultless heroine, any incarnation of all saintly and impossible virtues, but simply a woman, *hardly that yet*, a young girl, with neither friends nor

fortune, with nobody in the wide world to warn or counsel her; a young girl in many respects singularly attractive, with many fine attributes of character, with good sense, and on the whole, earnest desires to do right; but still impres-  
sible, susceptible, carrying ever with her some vague sense  
of loss and unfulfillment in her life.

She was not above caring for admiration. It pleased, delighted her, as it does most of her sex, and I think she was peculiarly susceptible to it, because with her there were no family ties to take its place. And she had come to know before this—no matter how—women usually have an unerring instinct in such cases, that Guy Humphreys admired her; a knowledge that would have flattered almost any woman.

He had, however, by no word or gesture, ever given expression to this feeling, until that afternoon; but the kiss by the pond, so light and reverential that it hardly grazed her forehead—that parting at the door, and, above all, that ride of twenty-five miles and back, just for an hour or two of her society, told to Janet Strong its own story.

And she walked up and down her room, while the darkness came up slowly and drowned the twilight, with a pleased smile about her lips, and a gleam of triumph in her eyes, her memory gathering up and feeding her vanity with every word, and tone, and gesture of this man's, and marveling greatly within herself to find that she had been able to inspire a man like Mr. Humphreys with interest and admiration.

He was not one of those weak sort of men whom the sight of a pretty face always throws off their balance; neither was he worse than that, a man who liked on all occasions to prove his power over women by awakening an interest and tenderness for himself on their part. For all this Guy Humphreys was too high-toned and honorable a man. But Janet Strong was a different sort of woman from any who had come in his way. There was in her so much freshness and simplicity, combined with so much intelligence and reserve power, as her life had proved, that she was a perpetual interest and study to the accomplished and critical gentleman.

The women whom he had known, had been daintily and tenderly reared; whatsoever they were, they owed in a large sense to circumstances; but here was one against whose whole life they had set their faces, who could in most

things fairly take her place among the women of his circle, and bear off the palm from many of them. This was what puzzled the man. Besides, there was nothing in the remotest degree masculine about Janet. She was naturally somewhat shy when her subject did not possess her, and her passion for improvement led the way to long and frequent conversations betwixt the gentleman and his governess; and the straightforward simplicity and eagerness with which Janet asked her questions, and received his communications, were something entirely new, and as he termed it, "very refreshing" to Guy Humphreys.

At last there came a soft knock at Janet's door. - She knew who it was before she opened it, and found Maude in her night-dress.

"Why, I had no idea it was so late!"

"What makes you stay up here in the dark, all alone?" asked the child, with that pretty peremptoriness which everybody allowed in her.

"Well, a fancy I've happened to take."

"And I shall make my evening prayer here in the dark, with the stars looking in at the window?" said Maude, for the twilight was almost gone now.

"Yes, if you like, dear," answered Janet, softly.

So the child knelt down, and looked like a white cloud drifted to the floor, as she clasped her hands on her governess's lap, and lisped out her evening petitions in her young, serious voice, closing with that one prayer, which in its worship, and supplication, articulates all human need and trust, and whose sentence is the eternal witness of that tie, close and blessed, between the earthly child and the Infinite Parent, "Our Father, who art in Heaven." Maude rose up.

"Will you kiss me good night here?" laying her hand on the curls of the little pupil she had grown to love, almost as a mother her first-born.

"Yes—yes; only first I should like to ask you a question, Miss Janet;" a little uncertainty and gravity in her tones.

"Well, what is it?"

"I don't think that quite all this prayer belongs to us, to such folks as you and me?"

The child's voice crept slowly and cautiously along the words, as though she sought somehow to fortify her meaning

by them, as children are apt to when they deal with doubts and abstractions.

"What part of the prayer, Maude?" asked her governess, curiously.

"Why, that part which says, 'Keep us from temptation. Deliver us from evil.' It must mean very wicked folks, such as murderers, and thieves, and liars, you know," her voice going glibly enough along her meaning now.

Janet Strong drew her breath. Was an angel speaking to her through this child?

"I think, Maude, that prayer is for just such people as you and me!"

"You do! What temptation have you and I had, what evils to be delivered from, this very day now?" concentrating all the force of her argument in a practical application of it.

"Kept not only from wrong acts, my child, but from all wrong, and angry and foolish thoughts; from all vain, unworthy and selfish feeling, which our Father in Heaven could not approve of, and which we should blush to carry before him—this is what the prayer means," answered Janet, feeling as though she was uttering her own condemnation, yet none the less would she hold back the truth because of this.

Maude drew her breath.

"I didn't think it went so deep as that."

"Didn't you? I'm afraid we are all apt to forget it. But to-night, after you are snugly tucked up in bed, just go carefully over all the hours of this day, and see if you can't recall some wrong word, or thought, or act, which brings the prayer home to you too."

Maude kissed her teacher with a new feeling of solemnity that night, and went out softly with her own thoughts. And Janet sat alone with hers in the starlight. That question of her little pupil still stood in her soul awaiting its answer. Had she too, this day, been "Kept from temptation, and delivered from evil?"

Had not both of these come to her in the soft kiss which Guy Humphreys had pressed on her forehead, standing there in the warm May light by the thick shrubbery, with the boat rocking at her feet?

If Evelyn, his wife, had been there, would he have caressed her so? Would he go back to-night and tell her all he

had done? To these questions Janet's instincts could make but one answer; still she tried to put them aside; they were not pleasant ones. She got up and paced her chamber in the darkness, and told her conscience that it was very absurd and squeamish to put such a harmless little gallantry in such a light, that neither she nor Mr. Humphreys *meant* anything by the act, or the permitting of it.

But when she looked out of the window, there were the steadfast stars, and still over the waves of her disturbed thoughts rode and anchored in the deep places of her soul the soft voice of Maude Woolcott, "Keep us from temptation, and deliver us from evil."

And at last she turned and faced the thought. *Was* there any "temptation" here? If Mr. Humphreys really was interested in, admired, was in a certain sense fond of her —was it wrong? And now Janet was honest with herself —putting away with a struggle all vanity and personal feeling from the matter; and so her thoughts, as once before, cleared themselves out into the truth. She saw that this thing must inevitably result in unhappiness for both of them. The *spirit* of such a revelation must be kept secret from all the world, as well as any expression of it.

What right had she to entertain toward Guy Humphreys a feeling which his wife must regard as a wrong done to herself? And what right had Guy Humphreys to bestow caresses on her, which he would not for a moment permit Mrs. Humphreys to receive from another man? Her friend, steadfast, affectionate, he might be, but something more and tenderer than this, something that all high and pure souls of men and women must universally condemn, this something without name, more than friend, less than lover, Guy Humphreys must not be to her.

It would be very pleasant, doubtless, walking in these paths that they might christen friendship, but there was temptation lurking there, and evil beyond.

And then the fair face of the girl-wife, who had received her into her home and treated her, unknown stranger as she was, in all respects like a friend and equal, seemed to rise up and reproach Janet. Not that she believed it in her power, as it certainly never entered her thought, to win the allegiance of Guy Humphreys from his wife, but she might intrude on thoughts and interests to which Evelyn alone had right or title, and here Janet began to feel the need of fortify-

fying herself. She was not in love with this man, but his admiration was so pleasant to her that in the end it might become a necessity to her happiness. It would be best, even now, to watch herself, and to allow neither thought nor fancy to slip off into these dangerous channels. "God helping me," said Janet, lifting her steadfast face to the stars, "I will do the right in this matter."

So her will gathered itself up once more mightily, and that night, when her voice failed to carry its burdens, her soul took it up and bore it before God, "Keep us from temptation, and deliver us from evil."

"Miss Janet," said Maude, coming to her governess next morning, after breakfast, "I thought over what we talked of, after I was in bed last night, and I found it was just as you said, that the prayer was intended for me too."

Janet caught the child to her heart. "So did I!" she said softly.

Maude looked up in a great surprise, but there was something in the face of her governess just then which prevented her making any further inquiries.

## CHAPTER VIII.

AT the time appointed, Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys returned. The latter was in the most sparkling mood, full of effervescent delight at getting home again, with all kinds of amusing and picturesque stories of her visit. She had a demonstrative meeting for Maude, and one hardly less so for Janet, scattering her brightness, very much like sunbeams, everywhere, only there was more restlessness, and less warmth in it, for Evelyn Humphreys was only a child still, and a spoiled one at that.

Mr. Humphreys met his governess very cordially, but not just as he had done that day by the pond.

That afternoon, however, Janet entered the library in search of a book, and to her surprise found Mr. Humphreys, reading some letters, when she fancied him in the grounds with his gardener.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir," with her hand on the door knob, "I will not interrupt you. Another time will answer my purpose as well."

"Come in—come in, Miss Janet," insisted the gentleman. "I shall be vexed if the sight of me actually frightens you away. What were you in quest of?"

"Only the last volume of Louis the Fourteenth's Reign, but my want is not imperative."

Mr. Humphreys took the volume from the shelf, brought it forward, and handed it to Janet.

As she received it his hand closed softly, and tightly over hers. "Miss Janet," he said, "I was not satisfied with the welcome which you gave me this morning."

Poor Janet! It was a cruel moment for her. She could not bear the thought of offending this man, her friend, her benefactor, and the old love of admiration came over her. She faltered a moment, and then the thought of her prayer came in and rescued her. "You must have forgotten, my dear sir: *I said I was intensely glad to see you and Mrs.*

Humphreys back, and I am not demonstrative, as you know. That meant a great deal with me."

"Perhaps so; but I did not say all I wished to;" and he bent down his face, and in a moment the little scene by the pond would have been repeated.

Janet drew her head back swiftly. The blushes were alive in her cheeks, but her voice was faithful to her this time, as she drew back. "No, Mr. Humphreys, that is a kind of welcome back which I have no right nor title to, unless Mrs. Humphreys is by to indorse it."

The gentleman looked at her with a half thwarted, half perplexed face. "But supposing Mrs. Humphreys, as is quite possible, should object to so explicit an avowal of my sentiments, thinking that they impinged somewhat on her rights?"

"Then certainly, sir, *I* ought to."

There was no mistaking Janet now. Her steadfast voice, her whole face, lifted itself into a meaning which could not be mistaken.

The courtly gentleman was chagrined, baffled. "I thought you regarded me as your friend, Miss Janet, in some deeper sense than society permits to that name," he said in a tone half crest-fallen, a good deal wounded, a little reproachful.

"In every true and honorable sense I hope I may always do this, Mr. Humphreys;" and her voice almost unconsciously shaded the adjectives with a deeper meaning.

Guy Humphreys' nature was one that under ordinary circumstances would respond promptly to a sentiment like this; but just now wounded vanity, and defeated pride, held the mastery.

"And did you fancy that I wished to be your friend in any lower sense?" a little petulant, a little indignant. But Janet had taken the first step, and that had given her courage.

"Whatever I may have fancied, Mr. Humphreys, I believe that you have the will, as you certainly have the power, to prove you are—all I said."

It was hard to resist the sweet, earnest face turned up to him now; still, it would have taken a better man than Guy Humphreys to acknowledge on the moment that he had been weak, and wrong, and baffled in it all, too, by a woman, that in the world's eyes, at least, was greatly his inferior, although

he did not think of Janet in this light. He made one more effort.

"And so I am to be your friend only just so far as Mrs. Humphreys has knowledge and gives consent?"

"Only just so far." A smile came with the words, but somehow, at that moment, Guy Humphreys thought of sunshine upon a rock.

The man's face cleared up a little. He took the girl's hand and touched it to his lips. "Well, then, just so much as this, I am ready and willing to confess to Mrs. Humphreys," and he returned to the library.

Janet went her way. Perhaps you will think she had only acted right in this matter, and deserved no especial credit for it. But it is a hard thing sometimes to "only act just right," especially when insidious, and very pleasant temptations beguile us. When the millennium comes, and not before, we may do that.

If the temptation had come in a more overt form, she might have braced herself to resist it, but this flattering preference of Guy Humphreys carried so fair and innocent a face, and then you must recollect, she had no friends to warn and advise her in a matter of this kind. She could not see that this private flirtation with a married man, for call it by what softer name we may, it would have inevitably developed itself into this, could only ultimate in pain and heartburning and unhappiness.

Her sense of right would grow confused; her judgment lose, more or less, its balance; her vanity would be stimulated; her emotions strained, and if she had not actually fallen in love with the gentleman, his attentions and admiration would have awakened an interest, and a class of emotions, that must have held her in a constantly morbid, and unhealthful state of feeling.

And when the end came, as sooner or later it must, there would have been wasted thought, and emotions to lament, and unhappy memories, which, if not keen remorse, would not be readily laid to sleep, and throughout their whole intercourse a constant sense of something hidden and wrong *in spirit*, whose tendency could only be to relax the whole moral tone of her character. And Guy Humphreys, although he might recoil at the thought of doing Janet any serious wrong, would have done just what many men would, who make far greater professions than this one did, have

allowed and invited the fine tendrils of her feelings to wind themselves about him, and in his secret soul he would have hugged with delight the consciousness of the power he had gained over this girl.

And he would have gone on, knowing all the while that he was doing Janet an irretrievable wrong—that only out of long pain, and struggle, could she be delivered from the snare in which he was entrapping her, and that he must leave a scar on her soul which it was doubtful whether time could ever efface.

All this Guy Humphreys would have known, and yet, his gratified self-love would have led him to pursue the game, not without frequent expostulations of his better nature—not without occasional remorse and regret, and certainly not without his own feelings were deeply enlisted in the matter. He would probably have stopped short of any overt disloyalty to his wife, but the spirit of the flirtation would have been the same, and from its roots, sooner or later, he must have reaped his harvest of lost self-respect, of bitter, and remorseful memories.

Janet did not suspect half of the misery from which that small heroism of hers had delivered her. She went to her room and sat down with her book in her lap, and went over the interview in her thoughts. She knew she had done right, she was glad of it, but yet she was very much afraid that she had given Mr. Humphreys abiding offense, and that he would treat her with only cool politeness in future.

She felt quite too much solicitation on this subject, for she was very far from perfect, at the best, and was not half willing enough to leave results in their own place.

Before night, however, she was set at rest here. Mr. Humphreys and she came upon each other unexpectedly, on the back piazza, where she had gone to enjoy some early roses and hyacinths, which the gardener had placed there.

The first feeling of mortified vanity and baffled self-love had worn itself off, and his better self had gained the ascendant. It had cleared even the face of Guy Humphreys, as he gave Janet his hand. "I have been thinking over what you said to me this morning," looking at her with a smile.

"*And how did you think of it, Mr. Humphreys?*"

"*Well, I finally concluded that you were a remarkably*

sensible little woman, Miss Janet, although you made me feel like a very great fool, or something worse."

"Oh, I hope not! Nothing, I assure you, was further from my intention."

"Most likely! The deduction from the premises, however, was a logical one, although you were in nowise responsible for it; but, Miss Janet, you have shown me to myself in a very silly and absurd light, and that is a little more than I ever had the grace to acknowledge to any woman before. And 'now, because my punishment has been severe enough, will you forgive me, and take me for what you said, your friend, in every true and honorable sense?"

There were tears in the eyes of Janet Strong, and the two clasped hands in this new covenant, in which was neither weakness nor sin.

"I was not wrong in believing you had the will to be this to me," she said.

At this moment Evelyn danced out on the veranda, for through the stir and brightness of the spring days she was restless and migratory as a bird.

As the lady met her husband and her governess, she started with a tragic pantomime of surprise and indignation.

"Miss Janet," said the little lady, with a laugh in her eyes, which took from tone and gesture all their tragic emphasis, "I have borne my sorrows in meekness and silence, until both have ceased to be a virtue. It is with me a settled conviction that you have enticed my husband from his marital allegiance, and that I am an unloved, neglected, outraged wife! What further proof could I desire of all this, than coming thus suddenly upon a private conference betwixt you and Mr. Humphreys, when I fancied one in the school-room, the other in the grapevines?"

"Evelyn, my dear, what a charming actress your father's fortune spoiled! The drama is your vocation."

"Don't think to appease my roused indignation by prettily turned compliments," shrugging her shoulders. "Will you solemnly affirm that this meeting was entirely unpremeditated on your part, Mr. Humphreys?"

"Entirely! I came out here to see how my roses and hyacinths were progressing, and found a fairer than either among them."

"The man doesn't hesitate to avow his sentiments, right in my presence!" exclaimed Mrs. Humphreys, with another pantomime, which said something her eyes did not.

"There is no danger, my dear madam, so long as such sentiments are only uttered in your presence," interposed Janet.

"I did not think of the matter in that light. You always have something so sensible, so straight to the point, little lady, that nobody can dispute it. And you will assure me, Mr. Humphreys, that it is only in your wife's presence you would make such a compliment to Miss Janet?"

Evelyn Humphreys did not suspect how near the truth her jesting question struck, or that the young teacher's glowing cheeks had some deeper source than the light talk of the moment.

"I can positively affirm that Miss Janet would not listen to any such speeches, if I made them outside of my wife's presence."

A new joy thrilled Janet at these words. Already she was reaping her reward for what she had done. She turned and looked at Mrs. Humphreys with her glad eyes, in which was some meaning that the lady could not interpret.

But there was some language of truth and loyalty in her face, which moved the impulsive little woman:

"I know she wouldn't," she said. "I would trust Miss Janet under any circumstances in the world. She is true to the core."

"Do you really place my integrity so high as that?" asked Janet, hardly conscious of what she said, only knowing one thing, that she would prove herself worthy of the young wife's trust through all future temptation.

"Yes, just so high," said Evelyn Humphreys, half repeating in her own face the gravity which she saw in Janet's.

Guy Humphreys listened to all this—watching the two women. What he thought of it all, neither his face nor his words showed, only Janet felt there was some secret, perhaps unacknowledged motive which prompted him to say, suddenly and soberly, to his wife:

"Evelyn, do you think it would be possible for you to be jealous of me?"

The young wife's face fell into a momentary meditation as she looked off at the possibility, and her face and voice were almost stern as she answered:

"I might, if you gave me occasion for it."

Janet drew a long breath of thankfulness. And afterward this struggle through which she had come was not without its salutary effect upon her life and character, and they drew from it some new moral power of resistance.

She had been in quite too relaxed and too receptive a state, drifting along with the smooth currents of her pleasant, luxurious life, and letting them carry her pretty much as they would, feeling that she was nestled down in a delightful security, where there was nothing to be resisted, nothing to be overcome.

But this trial stirred her; her conscience was quickened, her higher faculties aroused themselves. She began to feel that here too she might render some service, have some influence for good. She had not been overcome of adversity, she told herself; with God's help she would not be of prosperity.

And now the large old country mansion, over which the winter had gone dreamily, in its soft, white garments, began to rouse itself into some new life of bustle and anticipation.

Mrs. Humphreys declared she had hibernated quite long enough, and relished the thought of seeing some of her city friends again.

"It's such a charming place, letting alone the attraction of Guy's society and mine, that I've no doubt we shall be overrun with company before the summer is out," she said to Janet.

And Janet thought of the winter, with its happy, brooding quiet, and longed to take Maude and hide herself and her little pupil off somewhere in the heart of the deep green summer, where the gay city people who were about to make their advent would never disturb them.

## CHAPTER IX.

It was half library and half sitting-room, combining the best features of both in an attractive and home-like way, and the master of the house sat here alone on this evening of which I have somewhat to tell you.

A young man still, among his early thirties, with a face that on the first glance you would be likely to call homely—most people did—for the features were large, and lacked fineness and regularity of outline. But it was a face which bore scrutiny, which, the more you investigated it, the more you found in it to interest and attract. The gray, thoughtful eyes grew pleasant and animated, and looked at you from a soul that had no concealments—nothing of fear or shame to hold back—eyes that gave you hints, if you studied them long and wisely, of fair and goodly chambers, hung with purple and fine linen, in this man's soul, where, if one could but find the key to enter, there would be room ever, after to come and go, and find princely entertainment.

Bryant Whitney sat by the table this evening, just as he never sat outside of this room; that comfortable, lounging attitude seemed fitted to no other place. Books and papers were scattered profusely about him; indeed, two sides of the room were lined from floor to ceiling with these; but his paper had slipped from his hands, and he was resting his head on one while his eyes were on the grate, whose bed of anthracite was now one wide blossom of living fire, and the thoughts of this man had gone far out of the pleasant room where he sat—out into a cold that was sterner and bitterer than that winter's night was.

The years were once more driving their sleet and storm in his face, and he was making his way against them with all the might and stress of his soul, fronting his hard, pitiless fate, boy as he was, with a resolution that taxed every fiber and faculty to meet and conquer it.

Poverty, and all that comes of it, had the boyhood and *youth* of this man Bryant Whitney known to the core. His  
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father had failed in business and died in one year, leaving his mother, a delicate, mimosa-natured woman, with three children dependent solely on her for their support. Bryant was the eldest of these, and at that time just outside of his thirteenth birthday. He went at once into a store as errand boy, and was, as an especial favor, allowed to board at home with his mother and sisters; and the money which they received in this way was the main dependence of the family.

What a slow, hard, bitter struggle it was—the pinching and suffering on every side! He wonders now, when he thinks of the slender resources, how they managed to live at all in the three rooms that made all they had of home. He seems to see the sad, pale face of his mother lifted up from her sewing every night when he returned from his work, and the lips seeking after a little smile of welcome.

Through all this his heart and his courage never once failed him. There had been something almost sublime in the faith and purpose of this boy to lift himself and his family out of the misery and oppression of poverty. It was not so much matter for him. At the worst, he had health and strength to wrestle with the world; but for the mother and the sisters—the pain and the privation wore hard on them as the years went by, each one trampling with heavy feet upon their delicate lives, until they failed and went out beneath it. There was no use in denying it. Lack of rest and tender care and comfort had laid his mother and her eldest daughter in the graves, over which the fierce gusts of wind outside were spinning the snow that night. It was true that their last days were surrounded with all needful comfort, for the untiring energy and perseverance of Bryant Whitney had brought their reward in a larger salary, which lifted his family at last out of that sordid poverty in whose shadow they had walked so long.

For years he would not admit to himself that it was this which had killed them. You could see by the hard setting of the lips, and the mournful eyes which looked into the fire, how the thought stung into the fastnesses of his soul now; but the fierce, high spirit of his youth did not rebel against it as it had then. He slipped his hand in his pocket and drew out some loose silver coin. There was something mournful in the way he looked at it.

"I've got enough of this, and to spare," murmured Bryant

Whitney to himself, "and yet I can remember the time when this little glittering pile would have made my very life overflow for joy. How rich I should have felt, going home and taking it out before the eyes of the dear little household up there in the chambers of that back street! I went by the old house the other day, and gave twice as much as this to a little tow-headed child whom I found playing on the steps, just because he happened to live under *that* roof. How rich we should all have felt! What a feast it would have brought us; and a pair of shoes or a dress for Trot, little Trot!"

The voice of the strong man sank into an ineffable tenderness over this name; the silver slid with a sharp clink on the table, and he reached his hand over, took a small blue china mug that always stood there on a pedestal of some rare and daintily-carved wood, which must have cost ten times the price of the bit of porcelain which it supported. Bryant Whitney stroked the little mug with a tenderness and pride that was like a mother's, smoothing her baby's cheek, and then he held it up to the light and read the letters raised on the front of the mug—"To my brother." It was little Trot's gift a dozen Christmases ago, when his salary had been raised, and began to pour its small, precious tributaries into the household, and they all began too to talk like the rest of the world of the dear Christmas gifts.

That little cup was the result and concentration of half a year's saving of pennies on Trot's part, that he had given her. He could see her now as she put it in his hand, the young, sweet face in a flame of delight that caught up the blue eyes and the pretty little head—God help him—it was so low now!

"Trot!"—she had another name at the christening font, but this was her household one, sanctified by tenderness and sorrow and later happiness—Trot was Bryant Whitney's younger sister, his pet, his idol, for whom he had planned deepest, and toiled hardest. She was a bright, sweet, intelligent little creature, full of pretty ways and words, and full of little, swift archnesses and surprises of manner, which interested and charmed every one who met her. He had thought more of her than of himself through all those boyish dreams of future success and prosperity, which the steadfast will of Bryant Whitney had made certainties to *him*.

What a lady he intended to make of little Trot! What a pleasant, graceful, happy home he had promised himself, where she should reign the sweet girl-mistress! Warm heart and strong arm should shelter her—the youngest and darling of the household that was mostly in heaven—from all the cold harshness of the world. The rains had beat heavily into her childhood, but her youth should pay back the debt in sunshine.

So reasoned Bryant Whitney, and little Trot sat on his knees with her small snowflake of a hand at rest in his hair.

But little Trot never went to be mistress of the home they both used to plan and dream about—never dreaming, too, that another, a fairer one, was being builded without stroke of axe or sound of hammer.

Poor little Trot! she lived to see somewhat of her brother's prosperity—lived to have all the early shadows slip off from her life, and to find herself surrounded with every comfort that love or money could furnish.

But one day, just after she had skirted her sixteenth year, the girl went out to ride; a sudden shower overtook her, and she returned with a chill and cold. In a few days a slight little cough followed. Trot laughed, and said it was nothing; she wasn't made of such frail stuff that a shower would wash her out. But the little cough continued, and she began to have a habit of pressing her hand to her side, and any sudden exercise quite took away her breath.

Her brother, in dread that he would not acknowledge to himself, consulted a physician. He said there was little cause for apprehension. She must be careful of herself, take tonics, and so on.

But to the watchful eyes that held her in their tenderness, Trot did not grow better; her strength failed slowly, and the faint little buds that used to make a hint of bloom in her fair cheeks, opened suddenly into a strange, bright radiance, in singular contrast with the tired look in her blue eyes.

With the spring, the girl grew rapidly worse, and, in an anguish of desperation, her brother left his business and traveled with her, hoping that she would recuperate in a change of climate.

But Trot failed day by day. Bryant Whitney's soul rose in fierce rebellion at the thought that his sister was going to her family in heaven. Trot had had an easier time

than the rest, he told himself. She had been too young to feel the privations under which her mother and elder sister had sunk, and for years her life had been free from hardship.

But one day this pleasant thought on which Bryant fondly hung, was dashed to the ground. Trot's last physician, a man of rare experience and skill, had been sitting at her bedside, watching the sweet invalid gravely for awhile. The girl had fallen asleep, and the bright, dark hair, pushed back from her face, showed to her brother and the physician the thin, wasted outlines as they had never shown before.

The physician shook his head gravely, and turned to Bryant.

"I cannot understand," he said, "why the child has so little recuperative power. Her youth ought to be in her favor, but her vital forces seem to have no strength to rally. I should fancy, sir, under other circumstances, that, being naturally of a delicate organization, your sister must have experienced some long neglect or repression in her childhood, which has depressed her vitality."

And the doctor little suspected how his words touched the core of the truth, or what agony each one darted to the soul of the man who listened.

It was true, then! Little Trot must be another sacrifice to the old poverty. For whole days it seemed to Bryant Whitney that this thought would goad him into madness. All the anchors of faith and hope gave way, and left him, drifting him about on a dark sea, with doubt and rebellion in his soul.

Before that spring was over they laid the fresh turf over little Trot. She went out with a smile, holding Bryant's hand to the last, and whispering to him that she was only going just a little while before him, and there was no fear in her death. That comforted him, and his heart did not break; and afterward God came and strengthened the soul of this man, making it tenderer and better than before.

His business prospered. In the old commercial house which he had entered as an errand boy, he rose from one honorable position to another, and at last stepped from head clerk into junior partner.

He still held fast, in his inmost soul, to the boyish dream of home, although now there was none to share it with him. People wondered and gossiped, and were certain that

Bryant Whitney had it in his thought to take some fair woman to wife, when he purchased his pleasant old-fashioned homestead, with a quaint old garden, a little outside of the city, and furnished it with so much simple taste. But he never brought any other mistress to it than the housekeeper, an old lady with broken fortunes, who had been kind to his mother.

And here he lived alone, with a broad and generous hospitality for the friends who crossed his threshold, but dwelling mostly among the books and studies, which his youth had denied him. And Bryant Whitney evinced here the same steadfast patience and energy which had made his fortune, for he was now fairly on the road to riches; but he did not fall into temptation now, nor make money, as so many men in like circumstances would have done, the great aim and purpose of his life. Of course such a man must have the reputation of being singular; for though social with his friends, he could not be persuaded into general society, and it was somewhat difficult to draw him from his home for a single evening. But this one, as the man's thoughts went down the long path of the years into his boyhood, some unusual sense of loss and loneliness came over him. The old longing for the dead faces pressed in heavily on his soul. He rose up and stood by the grate, and his gaze swept mournfully about the room.

"Mother—Miriam—Little Trot! I've got the home now—pleasant, comfortable, elegant; just what you'd have wanted. We might all have been so happy here. But I'm alone—all alone; the money's come too late—too late!"

The last words were buried in a great huskiness, which seized the throat of Bryant Whitney, and the gray eyes, looking on the coals, swam in tears.

I am showing you here a peculiar and exceptional aspect of this man. Bryant Whitney was of too healthful a nature, morally and mentally, to yield often to despondency like this. Moreover, he was a Christian man, and the sorrow and hardship of his youth stood out, year by year, in clearer significance to him. The God whom he loved, and who loved those that were with Him in heaven, with a love infinitely tenderer and deeper than his, had permitted all the pain and loss. It was over now. They—the mother and sisters—were happy beyond his fairest hope or dream; they could look back now, out of their eternal calm and joy, on

the dark earthly cloud under which they had walked ; all that seemed strange and heavy in it had passed away to them. It would to him in a little while.

So Bryant Whitney usually felt and reasoned. He was happy, too, beyond what most men are, even in his loneliness ; occupied with his business, assiduous in his studies, which he enjoyed the more keenly for the long denial he had sustained. A man not much given to sentimentality, of a strong, keen, sturdy common sense, with a character that rested on a broad basis of practicality.

The front-door bell rang just as those last words—"Too late!"—lost themselves on the speaker's lips ; a moment later, his door was opened and held by the servant, while there entered slowly a boy—a pallid, limping, ragged little fellow, with an old-young face, somewhere in its early teens. At the best, the light, rough hair, the pinched, freckled face, would have had little attractiveness in it ; but just now it was half-frozen with dread or fear, and the warm, luxurious room, and the gentleman in his rich dressing-gown, before the grate, seemed fairly to scatter whatever wits the boy originally possessed. He stood still, with one hand in his pocket, and the other fumbling, in a nervous, uncertain way at the solitary button on the old coat, which must have originally fitted a pair of shoulders broader and taller than his. Altogether, this boy had the stunted, repressed look of abject poverty and misery ; yet he had not a hard, bad face. Bryant Whitney saw this with his first, rapid, incisive glance, and he was a reader of physiognomies.

"Well, my boy, have you come to see me ?" he asked, rising up, in that pleasant, kindly tone which would be sure to send comfort and courage into the most cowardly heart.

The boy took off his cap, looked up into the man's face—the thin lips worked a moment with something which would be sure to assert itself in its own time ; then the pitiful words came.

"Yes, sir, I have. I have nobody in the world to come to but you."

"Well, then, you did right to come. Sit down here, and tell me what is the matter. The boy who comes to me as his only friend, will be certain to find that I shall not turn him off."

*The boy took the chair to which the other motioned; he*

sat down and turned his face toward his host with such a greedy appeal, struck through and through with such a terrible doubt and fear, that Bryant Whitney was satisfied at once that this boy's need went far beyond the reach of any common charity, and took hold of something that was hidden and vital. He could not stand that look. The boy's secret would not, or could not transpire without further invitation. And Bryant Whitney laid his hand almost involuntarily on the boy's shoulder, and said, out of the pity to which that old-young, wretched face moved him:

"Whatever the trouble is, let me help you to bear it, my boy."

Then the answer came, pierced through and through with remorse, anguish, desperation:

"You won't help me to bear it when I tell you where I came from this very morning."

"Try me before you say that."

The grave, compelling, pitying eyes were on the boy's face; he rose straight up, looking into them.

"I came from jail, sir."

Bryant Whitney was silent for a moment. Surprise held back his words. The boy stood still, with his hungry eyes on his face.

"Do you tell me to go now?" he asked, as a man might ask for his life or death.

"No!" said Bryant Whitney, softly. "I ask you to sit down again."

The boy did, shaking all over, like one in an ague; but some new light supplanted the dull anguish in his eyes.

"You have told me the greatest fact now," said Bryant Whitney, laying his warm fingers, in whose very touch there was strength and help, on his hand. "You have done right so far; now, once for all, you must lay bare the whole truth to me. What were you in jail for?"

"For stealing!"

That was all. I think that you might have heard the words in the farthest corner of the room, and have felt that they came out on a great writhe of agony and shame.

"And what did you steal for?"

This time the answer came as no falsehood ever did.

"Because I was hungry, and wanted bread."

"My child, there would have been no harm in begging—*there was in stealing it.*"

"I tried the begging first," said the boy, under his breath.

Bryant Whitney must probe this thing thoroughly; only so could he do this boy good; and a few more questions searched it to the bottom.

It was the boy's first crime. He had been out of work for three days, and with only scanty food during that time. He went into a store to beg a few pennies, and was repulsed with an oath.

"Afterward—" The speaker stopped here.

"You need not go on," said the listener.

He saw how it was. Harassed, hungry, desperate, without home or friends, the boy had fallen into temptation, and not been delivered from evil.

"It was only once?"

"Only once."

"And it was money?"

"Yes, sir—ten dollars."

"And how long ago was this?"

"Two months."

"And you have been *there* all that time?"

"Till this morning."

A few more questions like these drew the whole truth from the boy, for there was a straightforward honesty in Bryant Whitney, which compelled the truth from all with whom he was brought in contact; but in this instance there was no desire for concealment or subterfuge.

It appeared that the boy had more than a year ago attended the class of which Bryant Whitney was teacher, in the Mission School.

And in the great workroom of the prison, where he toiled, silently day by day, the words which this man had spoken would come drifting in like a sudden light over all the remorse, and shame, which the newsboy felt at his sin and disgrace, and they echoed in the dark corners of this poor, baffled, hunted prison-boy's soul, and would not leave him.

"What words were they, my child?" asked Bryant Whitney, strangely moved.

He repeated them as though he were reading from a book.

“No matter what you've done, boys, don't think the way to a better, honest life is closed up to you. The door to *repentance and reformation* is always open to you. Having sinned—*lied—stolen*—done anything that your better instincts tell

you was wrong, mean, low, don't be content in it, which is worse than the first sin. Stop—turn about, go back to the right road. God and his angels are ready to lead you, and never feel for one moment that you are lost, that there is no use trying. I tell you, in God's stead, that there is. I charge each one of you never to let the devil enter into, and take possession of your soul with that lie of his, which has dragged down so many a boy to ruin, earthly and eternal, that having fallen you cannot rise up; that having begun in the wrong road, you must go on sinning, for there is no help for you. It may be that some of you who hear me, cannot count the times in which you have done the wrong instead of the right. I bring to you the same message: it is not too late for repentance. Every one of you looking up to me now, has it in his power to be a true, good, honest man, a blessing to himself and his generation."

As the boy repeated the words, the low, long old room, which had outlived its service of a public hall, where Bryant Whitney had taken a class for six months, came back to him.

He saw again the long row of boyish faces, coarse, hard, pinched in their childhood by evil and poverty. How often his heart had sickened as he looked at them, and thought what their present was, and what their future promised. He had often felt that his labor had been lost there, and God had reproved his doubts and fears with an answer like this!

Those few words of his had followed this boy into prison, they had reached out their hands when there was none to help or to save, and he had followed them, as long ago Peter had followed the angel!

Bryant Whitney thought of all this before he spoke again. "And you made up your mind to come to me after you got out?"

"Oh no, sir. It never once came into my mind then. But all day long I've been walkin' up and down the streets, with nothin' to do, and knowin' nobody wuld hire a boy that was jest out of prison. Every little while, though, them words o' yours came back, and I meant to stick by 'em, and not steal ag'in, no matter how hungry I was; but to-night, when I found I must look out some old shed to sleep under, I jest said to myself, I might as well go back to prison

anyhow. I should be sure of a roof to cover me, and some-thin' to eat, which was a good deal more than I'd have outside; and when a boy'd been in prison once, it was all over with him, nobody'd trust him after that, and I made up my mind to help myself to anything I could get hold of. I should, too, for the next hour, if a chance had come. But all at once, when I was wishin' I was dead, and had half a mind to go down to the pier and drop myself into the water, I thought of you, sir, and I wondered if I could see you, if you'd stick by what you'd said to us boys in the Mission School, and say there was a chance for me now; and I don't know how it was—I didn't really mean to come here, but I kept askin' where you lived, and found my way out here at last, and then somethin' in me mustered up courage, and I rung the bell—it was my last chance, you know, sir."

Bryant Whitney leaned over, and took the small coarse hands in his warm ones, and if you had seen the light of the smile in which his face lay, you would never have thought him homely again.

"I shall stick by what I said."

A glance darted out from the eyes under that rough hair, a glance of hope, faith, gratitude, which came back to Bryant Whitney at times through all his after-life, and never came back without moving him.

"You have no friend in the world?"

"Not one, sir. My father and mother died when I was a very little chap, and left me in the care of an uncle, who used to get drunk every day, and beat me as he did his own boys. At last he went West afore I was twelve, and left me to shirk for myself. I've been a newsboy ever since."

"And what is your name?"

"Marcus Drew."

"Well, Marcus, look at me. I believe every word of the story you have told me, and you shall see that I can have faith and hope for a boy who comes to me, as you have done, although he is just out of prison. But to-night you are tired and hungry; you must have walked a good many miles to find me. Remain here to-night, and to-morrow we will talk your affairs over."

And before the boy, bewildered with astonishment and gratitude, could reply, Bryant Whitney rang the bell, and said to the girl who presented herself:

"Take this boy down stairs, Maria, and give him a good

warm supper, and hunt him up a suit of clothes out of the box up stairs, and prepare him a bath and a bed."

"Yes, sir," said the girl, looking at the strange guest with some curiosity; but she did not manifest the surprise which many domestics would have done at such an order.

The servants of Bryant Whitney were somewhat used to entertaining strangers of this kind.

When he was alone again, the gentleman resumed his seat by the grate. There was a look of softness about the large, resolute mouth, which did not articulate itself into a smile, and yet was something brighter and softer than one; there was a wonderful gladness in the far depths of his eyes, as he murmured, "I was wrong, Lord. The money has not come too late, so long as I can rescue souls like these with it."

## CHAPTER X.

WHEN June came with her praise of sunshine, and gladness of blossoms, the first installment of guests arrived at Guy Humphreys', and the luxurious quiet in which Janet Strong's life had bloomed so graciously, was broken up.

The girl had resolutely projected her own course this summer. She was determined, so far as possible, to sequester herself from the guests. There were several reasons for this. She was absorbed in her studies, and wanted time to pursue them without molestation. Then it is probable that a high-spirited pride lay at the bottom of Janet's resolution. If she could not meet these people on common social ground, she would not be patronized by them. Janet had a sensitive horror of this, which I think all fine natures have. I am not certain but she would have preferred to be the servant rather than the protégé of people, when their relative positions permitted any assumption of superiority on their part. Yet she was always perfectly ready to admit such when it did exist, whether it was that simply of position or wealth, or one that reached greater heights, the life and character.

Yet Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys had in a variety of ways signified their expectation that Janet should mingle with their company, and take her part and place in the festivities that were at hand.

Janet had inwardly resolved that she would maintain her seclusion, if possible, but she thought it wisest to avoid an open collision with her patrons on this subject.

So Mrs. Humphreys had evinced almost as deep an interest in the wardrobe of her governess as she had in her own, although there was a vast difference in the fabrics and styles of the two; but I am not certain that Janet's was not, after all, quite as attractive in its way as the rich lady's. Simple colors and styles best harmonized with her, and she had the taste to perceive this, and the good sense to adhere to them.

So the pretty blue, and white, and pink dresses, with some faint reliefs of ribbon or frostings of fine lace, in which the expanded salary of the young governess allowed her for the first time in her life to indulge, were just suited to her. Her face and figure seemed, in some fine sense, to appropriate them.

Mrs. Humphreys volunteered her exquisite taste in the selection of the dresses, and went quite into ecstasies over the result of each.

And Janet enjoyed the pretty lawns and muslins for their own sakes, and because there was a pleasant novelty in possessing and wearing such, but she said to herself, with a little smile that was not sad, "After all, I need not give myself so much trouble; none of these people will mind how *I* look."

The first guests who made their advent were rich, fashionable people—half a dozen in all—old friends of Evelyn's family, with no marked individuality of character.

There was a mother, stately and complacent, with a couple of daughters, proud, fashionable, commonplace girls, typical representatives of those you may find at any watering-place. There was a married niece also, with her husband; and altogether they made a lively time at the old mansion with their laughter and chatter, their projects for boating and riding, and general plans for hilarity and enjoyment.

It was impossible for Janet to avoid these people altogether, but she did not take very kindly to any of them, and was quite ~~contented~~ to remain in their sight simply as Maude's governess.

Such, however, was not at all the intention of Maude's aunt, as was evinced in a brief conversation betwixt that lady and her guests on the evening of their arrival.

Janet had been presented to them, and had seized the first opportunity to slip away, and sit half an hour by Maude's bedside, as was a habit with her.

"Evelyn, who is that young lady?" demanded the elder of the young ladies, as soon as the governess was out of hearing.

"Tell me first how she has impressed you?" answered the hostess.

"Oh, I think her charming in person and manner, although a little reserved. Have you neighbors like that in *this back corner of creation?*"

"No; she is not a neighbor," answered Mrs. Humphreys, feeling that now she could better afford to disclose Janet's true position. "Miss Strong is Maude's governess, but my especial friend, and occupies with us quite the position of an equal in all respects; does she not, Guy?"

"Of course, for she is worthy of it," subjoined the gentleman.

"Oh, indeed! I never should have suspected that," were the varied responses of the ladies.

"Suspected what—the friendship?" asked Evelyn quickly, it might be a little tartly, for she had detected a slight inflection in the ladies' tones, and understood what it implied perfectly.

"Oh no; not that, dear Evelyn, but the position."

"It is something we never think of," answered the lady.

And so, after this, Janet's position was somewhat defined to Mrs. Humphreys' guests. They might look at her curiously, but they would not treat her with marked indifference, or assume any of those patronizing airs which Janet would have found harder to bear than overt scorn.

But one way and another she managed to sequestrate herself mostly during the two weeks to which the visit was limited. Some excuse of walk or work was always at hand, which Mrs. Humphreys accepted in the stead of Janet's company, although she frequently expostulated at her absence.

The ladies, too, made an effort to be courteous ~~on all occasions~~ to the friend of their hostess, but ~~some~~ swift intuition assured Janet that all this was for Mrs. Humphreys' sake, rather than her own, and that outside of this influence she would sink in their estimation into the position of Maude's governess.

So she did not meet their cordiality half-way, as one of the young ladies complained to Mrs. Humphreys.

"I think she is rather reserved with strangers; at least she never makes the first advances with any one," was the lady's half apologetic defense of her governess; and that night she gave Janet a playful scolding for her persistent abstraction from company.

"I'm not going to have it so any longer, Miss Janet. You are one of the family in all respects, and are to make *yourself one*, instead of turning into a recluse in this *fashion*."

She said this, on stealing into the girl's chamber, and finding her absorbed in the second volume of Hume's History of England.

"I am one of the family to you, dear Mrs. Humphreys, and shall come back to my old place in the household when your guests are gone, but your kindness in this matter does not include theirs."

"Miss Janet, you are quite too sensible a girl, or woman, to have any squeamish notions of that kind."

"With you, or folks like you, I am certainly."

"And that implies that my guests are not of this sort, and several uncomplimentary things beyond that, which I am quite acute enough to penetrate," said the lady, with grave lips, and sparkling eyes.

"Well, then, let me adjure your kindness to equal your shrewdness, and permit me this once to have my own way."

"Which is to stay up stairs, devouring that dry old Hume," taking up the open volume on the table. "I believe you take a regular dose of it every day, Miss Janet, and I wonder how you stand it. For my part, I have terrible associations with that book, for it stood in papa's library ever since I can remember, and I made a number of spasmodic attacks at the first volume; but I never could get through with it—never."

A thought struck Janet, which sent her large eyes up mournfully to the smiling lady standing there. The old craving, impatient girlhood came back to her; the hungry instincts for knowledge, and grace, and finer life, which had dominated her through the hard years of loneliness and orphanage; while this woman's soul, of no higher nor finer stuff than hers, had turned away full fed from nourishment that Janet would have devoured greedily; and now her youth must be spent in slowly climbing heights, where her feet might have run swiftly. It seemed, just then, hard and cruel, and as though, at the best, her life were half abortive and baffled, and the thought that hurt her was in her face. Mrs. Humphreys misinterpreted it; the half-quizzical smile left her face.

"Why, my dear, if you feel so about going down, I shall not insist. Of course I want you to be happy in your own way."

Janet's quick, grateful smile repaid the lady tenfold.

*When she had got half-way down stairs, however, Mrs.*

Humphreys turned back, and opening Janet's chamber door, said to her, with a mixture of earnestness and amusement:

"Do you know, Miss Janet, that I have come to the conclusion that you are a very *funny* person?"

"I might be something worse than that, Mrs. Humphreys."

"Very true! You always have an answer ready, Miss Janet;" and she went down stairs, carrying her quizzical smile with her.

"Does Miss Janet decline to join us this evening?" asked Mr. Humphreys, as his wife and one of her guests seated themselves at the piano for a duet.

"Yes, Guy! Let her have her own way. Miss Janet is a kind of bookworm," glad to hit upon a word that would sufficiently explain to her guests the frequent withdrawal of Janet from their society.

"I expected she was one, from various slight peculiarities of manner," said the mother of the young ladies with some evident pride in her own penetration.

Janet, sitting up stairs, with her thoughts far away in the dawn of the new life of England, and watching for the first faint light of the morning, glimmering along the horizon of the middle ages, had no suspicion of the new reputation she had acquired. If she had, she would only have smiled at the very shallow knowledge of herself which such a verdict implied.

It was not true of her in any broad or complete sense, and Guy Humphreys knew it well enough when he said to his wife:

"It is not her books simply which shuts our little governess so closely in her cage up stairs."

"Oh, I know that, Guy! I must offer some excuse for her non-appearance, and that one had the merit of something a little better than any I could hit upon."

"And was true in a limited sense. These people, too, are quite out of her horizon; and, to tell the unvarnished truth, dreadfully commonplace, my Evelyn."

"Hush, Guy! You must not slander mamma's old friends," a reproof which fairly admitted her husband's criticism.

But after this, Janet Strong was not urged into the society of her guests, which, more or less, crowded the principal house in Woodleaf that summer.

The butterflies of wealth and fashion came and went, and made the silent rooms loud and gay with their presence, with bright flittings to and fro, and merry talk and laughter.

Janet kept steadfastly at her books and teaching, and the occasional meetings with the guests, spiced her days sufficiently. Some of them amused and interested her for the time, but they all, men and women, faded shadowy out of her thoughts as they disappeared.

Mrs. Humphreys had confidently anticipated a visit from her parents that summer, but her father's illness, in the spring, made a journey to the West necessary, and his wife accompanied him; so the young couple deferred their anticipated tour of the lakes, where they were to join the lady's parents, and in which it had been arranged that Janet and Maude should accompany them, and to which the governess had looked forward with a good deal of bright anticipation.

But Janet was mistaken when she believed that all the days of this summer were to flow on with her in these pleasant, noiseless channels. Its hours had some new patterns to weave in her own life, and to this girl was appointed some service to others out of her own sphere, for which her previous life and teaching could alone have fitted her.

## CHAPTER XI.

IN August there came a brief lull in the company which crowded the country seat of the Humphreys that summer. Saratoga, the White Mountains, and Niagara possessed a kind of magnetic coercion which the fashionable guests were unable to resist at this season, and the household settled back into its old channels of quiet, and even Evelyn Humphreys, with all her thoughtless gayety, enjoyed the change and quiet.

It lasted hardly more than a week, however, and this time the quiet was broken by the arrival of Mrs. Humphreys' father and mother, accompanied by a young lady friend, who was, in fact, distantly connected with the family; Evelyn's mother's only sister having married her father, whose daughter was this young girl, at that time only a few years out of her infancy.

Both the father and the stepmother died within a few months of each other, leaving the young orphan without brother or sister, and in possession of a large fortune entirely at her own disposal.

The new guests arrived somewhat suddenly, just as the family were going out to tea, for Guy Humphreys had the good sense and the good taste not to import city habits into his country home.

Mrs. Humphreys had never been separated for so long a time from her parents, and of course there was quite a demonstrative meeting on their unexpected arrival, made up of exclamations and welcomes, of tears and caresses, on the part of the ladies. Janet made her escape from it as noiselessly as she could. Such a family scene always saddened this girl. It brought home to her the contrast betwixt her own fate and that of most other women. The sense of want, of a life barren and impoverished, a great longing and aching for some family ties, which always lay at the bottom of the thoroughly feminine nature of this girl, always articulated itself at such times. The thought would come back

then, to strike its sharp pang through her, that there was not in the wide world a solitary human being on whose love or care she had the smallest claim. Away down in the child-years dwelt, tenderly and sacredly cherished, the memory of the mother-love which had been warmth and shelter and happiness until it went down into the grave.

So the young governess carried a shadow in her face as she went up to her room that evening, which even the sight of the sunset that spread before her its sea of gold, and islands of purple, did not quite dispel, and there came and went through the chill of her thoughts the first impressions she had had of Mrs. Humphreys' relatives.

Her father came first—a large, portly gentleman, a little bald, and quite gray, with a shrewd, business expression, not precisely hard, but even in its most complacent and social phases it always had to Janet Strong some faint association with counting-room, with letters and papers scattered all around, and talk of stocks, and shares, and fat dividends, and in the midst of all, in his large office-chair, with his head bent forward, and his eyes twinkling shrewdly behind his gold spectacles, the portly figure of Evelyn's father. The man seemed here in his natural element.

Mrs. Winchester was a fine-looking, dignified matron, with a pleasant, well-preserved face, with hardly a wrinkle from brow to chin, though the becoming clusters of curls on each side of her face were thickly sanded with gray. The resemblance betwixt mother and daughter was very faint.

The youngest face and figure had, however, made the strongest impression on Janet, during the few moments that she had had for observation. Indeed, the face was one to attract notice, and that took fast hold of one's memory, and held it faithfully long afterward. It was, by three or four years, out of its teens at this time; not handsome, still less pretty, and yet it had the power of singular beauty. The features were not strictly regular; the large eyes were of a dark brown, with swift luminous changes; the bright sweet mouth had hints of tenderness, and smiles, even in repose, but it could settle down into fine scorn, or resolute purpose.

"I never saw a face just like that one before," murmured Janet to herself, as it came up to her in her room, and drew her thoughts away from herself. "It interests me. I like it."

In the midst of her musing came a peremptory summons to tea from Mrs. Humphreys, and on entering the dining-room, Janet was playfully saluted by its mistress, even before she was presented to her guests :

"Now, little lady, you needn't fancy that you are going to run away from our folks after your old fashion. This is only our family, and you are one of it, and have got to make yourself so, socially and familiarly."

Then followed the introductions. All eyes were bent on Janet as she took her seat at the table; but if the gaze was somewhat curious, it was not cold nor critical, but pleasant and approving. Evidently Mrs. Humphreys' relatives were prepared to be pleased with her governess, and Evelyn had, in a few words, placed the girl in the light of a semi-heroine, in which the lady herself, perhaps half unconsciously, always regarded Janet. Thus put quite at her ease, kindly invited to her share in the conversation, Janet felt at home with these people, which, previous to their arrival, she had not supposed possible.

When the supper at last was over, intermitted as it had constantly been by bright talk, and jests, and stories, for there was much to tell on every side, Mr. Winchester, with a flourish of his hand, said to his son-in-law :

"*You may wait upon the old married ladies, Guy. I, for my part, always prefer young and blooming ones.*" And with some old-school ceremony, he offered an arm to his niece and Janet.

"If you hadn't the most amiable wife in the world, my dear, and your daughter didn't resemble her mother, you would never dare put such a slight upon both of us," subjoined Mrs. Winchester, as she took the arm of Guy which was not engrossed.

"Never mind him, mamma," subjoined Evelyn, whose affection was in a most demonstrative mood that evening. "It seems so good to see dear papa, and hear his voice once under my own roof, that I'm ready to bear meekly any slight that he may choose to put upon me, even to being ranked among old married women, and seeing young and pretty damsels preferred before me."

"Would you, my daughter?" said the old gentleman, seating the ladies; and then he seized Evelyn by the waist, and *perched* her playfully on his knee, and looking on the face

of his idol, the eyes of the father had a language just then, which they never did in the counting-room.

The evening which followed was a very happy one. Each brought tribute to it some gift of kindly deed or speech. The conversation ran in all kinds of by-paths; Mr. and Mrs. Winchester had a thousand amusing incidents to relate of their journey West, and Evelyn had her experience of housekeeping to go over, which was in reality little more than play, although she fancied her own wisdom kept the complicated domestic machinery in order.

"Guy," said Mr. Winchester to his son-in-law, at the close of one of his daughter's sparkling chapters of domestic history, "haven't you got rather more than you bargained for? I never suspected our little girl here would develop into the model mistress of a great country mansion. I must confess that I thought your housekeeping a pretty, fanciful experiment, and during the first few weeks which followed your migration, I looked for your return with almost every train."

"So did I," subjoined Mrs. Winchester. "Evelyn's sudden enthusiasm for the country, and housekeeping, seemed to me a pretty childish fancy, that would vanish with the first touch of reality."

"It's stood eight months' test though, nobly, you must admit, mother, and I appeal to Miss Janet to indorse me. Haven't we all had a thoroughly comfortable time since you came among us?"

This of course brought all eyes on the governess. Her answer came with the first thought, which might have been a little modified had she waited for a second, but was none the less true for all that:

"It seemed to me that we were the happiest people in the world!"

"There is no more to be said after that," laughed Guy Humphreys, and they all thought so.

Then the house had to be gone over by all the company, Evelyn preceding her guests, and displaying every nook and corner of her home with a look of triumph in her eyes, which was quite captivating.

In the midst of all this informality, it did not take long for the little party to become acquainted.

"You must have some charming landscapes about here?"

said Miss Wealthy Dana, standing, in the front window, and looking off on the lawn where the white mists drifted back and forth in the moonlight. "I shall find something to inspire my pencil and brush here."

"Most certainly you will, cousin Wealthy," responded Mrs. Humphreya. "But you must get Miss Janet to introduce you to the scenery. She has explored the country for miles around, and knows all the fine points in it."

Wealthy Dana turned the brightness of her face full on Janet:

"You love pictures then, Miss Strong? I am glad that we meet on common ground here."

"I cannot aspire to say so much as that of myself; my life has afforded me so little opportunity for æsthetic cultivation. But there are some landscapes about here which I have taken into my heart. You know nature is more democratic than most artists, and accepts and rewards any worship so that it is sincere."

"I believe she does, although I never thought of her in that light; still you will not deny that artistic cultivation helps one to see nature with truer, more loving eyes?"

"Oh, no," with a quick emphasis on both the mono-syllables; "and as I have never had this, I am quite unfitted for the work which Mrs. Humphreys has assigned me."

"Excuse me, I have an instinct that I shall differ from you there——"

The conversation, in which both the girls had come to take a keen interest, was suddenly interrupted by Mr. Humphreys, who placed a letter in Miss Dana's hand, saying:

"That came by this morning's mail, and prepared us in some way for your arrival. I came near forgetting it, cousin Wealthy."

The young girl hurried to the light, after thanking her cousin, and breaking the seal, ran over the letter with apparent interest. Then she tossed it on the table with a little disappointment in her face.

"What is it, my dear?" asked her aunt.

"It's from Robert Crandall, Aunt Esther. He finds it absolutely necessary to meet his family in Saratoga, and so, to his great regret, he cannot join our circle with his sisters this summer."

"Who in the world are Robert Crandall and his sisters?" inquired Guy Humphreys.

"Ask Wealthy, my son," said Mrs. Winchester, with a little quizzical smile about her mouth, little suspecting that there was another person present who could reply to it.

"I have no reluctance in answering you, cousin Guy. Robert Crandall's youngest sister was one of my classmates at boarding school, and we were intimate friends, and used to exchange visits every vacation. It was in this way that I became acquainted with her brother. We were at Newport together this spring, and I took the liberty, knowing your hospitality, of inviting Mr. Crandall and two of his sisters to join me for a few days at Woodleaf. Was that right, Evelyn?"

"Just right; but isn't there any more to tell, mamma?"

"I think there is. Mr. Crandall is a very superior man in every respect—handsome, highly cultivated—in short, a great favorite with the ladies, and he manifested very plainly that one was a favorite with him, by the marked attentions which he bestowed upon her at Newport."

Guy Humphreys whistled significantly.

"My dear, how could you be so rude, in the presence of ladies, too?" remonstrated his wife, in a way that would certainly have encouraged that gentleman to repeat his offense, had he felt the slightest inclination to do so.

Wealthy Dana spoke again—this time with a slight annoyance in face and manner: "I am not amiable, like most of my sex, and it always vexes me to be made the subject of jests in connection with any of my friends. Robert Crandall is only one of these. I have no reason to suspect that he desires to be more."

"I wish he had come, though," interposed Evelyn. "Mamma's description has inspired me with a desire to see him. Why, Miss Janet, what is the matter? you are looking like a ghost!"

"Am I? I believe I have felt sick for the last minute or two. It will soon pass off if I go to my room."

Mrs. Humphreys was profuse in offers, which Janet persistently refused, and making apologies, escaped to the silence of her own room soon as possible.

Her nerves had had a sudden shock; but she rallied from it in a few moments with her well-balanced mind and force of will. *In a single breath all the past had swept over her—*

the old, lonely girlhood, the terror, the Temptation from which she had been delivered.

"God has been very good to me again," she murmured, as she lay in her bed, at last, and the white moonlight came in at the open window, and filled her chamber with its solemn purity. "I would not meet this man for the world;" and then she turned over and slept.

## CHAPTER XII.

QUITE unconsciously to herself, Janet was slightly reserved on her next interviews with Wealthy Dana—not that she entertained a fear of any disclosures respecting herself from the young lady's intimacy with Robert Crandall; she had never seen his sisters, and it was in nowise probable that Miss Dana would allude to her in the young gentleman's presence, and in case she should, he would have every motive for concealing their former intimacy. But it was natural that the young girl should desire to avoid any associations connected with that part of her life—and Wealthy Dana suggested these—although Janet did not analyze the feeling which slightly indicated itself in her manner. But this had an effect directly opposite what she intended.

Wealthy Dana, the courted, flattered heiress, the cultivated, accomplished girl-woman, had taken a fancy to Janet; moreover, her curiosity was stirred, and her interest awakened by the young governess. She had been used to having her own way in everything, and was, from a natural pride of character, not much given to making advances; but in this instance, she quite unbent herself. She followed Janet about the grounds; she sought her in her own chamber; she insisted on her company in her walks, and interfered sadly with Maude's lessons. There was certainly much to love in Wealthy Dana, with all the errors of a wrong social education, which of course brought forth its legitimate fruits, in false opinions, and views of life. She lacked moral discipline, was governed by her impulses; but she had a nature, fine, generous, enthusiastic, under all her exactions and peremptory habits. Her nature was far deeper and broader than Evelyn Humphreys' could ever be, and had double the strength and fiber, but circumstances had never developed any of the latent forces of the girl's character.

It was impossible for Janet to resist the charm of her manner; for both men and women acknowledged this, and

there were many empty rooms in the heart of the little governess.

One sultry afternoon, at the close of Maude's lessons, Janet wandered down to the river with her little pupil. There was a faint pulse stirring the warm, fragrant air. The ripe sunshine of the late summer swathed the earth, and the river, with a deep joy in its heart, lay still and blue before her, looking up at the sky. And up and down the river looked at this moment the joyful eyes of Janet Strong, feeding themselves on the beauty of the slow, winding water, on the small islands that lay on its bosom like emeralds, until afar in the distance it seemed to grow into a wreath of blue mist, transfigured in the sunshine.

The small boat rocked tempting at their feet, and it naturally suggested Maude's eager, "Oh, dear! Miss Janet, I wish that you and I could have a sail this afternoon!"

"I wish we could, Maude; but neither of us can row; so our wish must wait, as a good many larger ones have to, in this life."

"No it mustn't; I can execute it this minute," said a bright voice at Janet's side, and there, with a laugh which held her whole face, stood Wealthy Dana, swinging her sun-hat.

"I saw you from my window when you came down with Maude. My book was tedious, and so I took the liberty of following you." She answered Janet's surprised look—  
"Am I intrusive?"

"Oh, no! I find there are some days which can bring to me gladness and wisdom, too, that no book can—days that have their own messages and inspirations, needing no interpreter."

A half-pleased, half-puzzled glance answered Janet.

"Where do you find these days mostly?"

"They are scattered all along from May to November; but they occur most frequently to me in the Indian summer, that time when the year ripens into its climacteric of beauty, and glory."

"That is my favorite season, too," and Wealthy Dana's face flashed up a meaning beyond her words. "Miss Janet, can you steer?"

"Mr. Humphreys has been my teacher. He says that I can as well as his wife."

"And I took lessons in rowing last summer, with a num-

ber of other young ladies, on a little lake near the watering-place where we were stopping for a month. I can manage a boat perfectly. You will not be afraid to trust me?"

"Not in the least," said Janet, delighted with the proposition; and in a few moments the girls succeeded in unfastening the rope which secured the boat to the bank. Wealthy Dana took the oars and Janet the tiller, and they glided out softly on the river, that lay like a broad blue plank under the trees.

The next hour was a delightful one. The winding river was full of picturesque points, and surprises, and one moment in the cool shadows along its borders, and the next touching the fairy islands, ruffled with dark shrubs, and then gliding over the still, broad water, the hours went by as they do sometimes in dreams.

The afternoon fairly drew them out of themselves. It was a pleasant thing to hear the bright young laughter, as the faint echoes caught it up, or their enthusiasm over some new point of view, some new glow of color, or gleam of beauty. Janet forgot her reserve—Wealthy Dana's truer nature discovered itself.

Somewhere late in the afternoon, just after they had set the boat toward home, a little silence fell over the trio. Maude dipped her small hands in the water, and dashed it up in showers; Janet fed her eyes on the crimson pillars thrown up by the sunset. At last she turned toward Wealthy Dana, who was languidly moving her oars, and met the young lady's eyes fastened gravely on her face.

"What are you thinking of me, I wonder?" she asked, and was sorry the next moment that her hasty thought had slipped out, and she could not call it back.

Wealthy smiled, but her eyes kept their seriousness. "I was thinking of what you were saying to Maude, when I found you this afternoon,—that many of our wishes in life had to wait—for their fulfillment, I suppose you meant?"

"Yes; isn't it true?"

"It isn't of mine, often. I have no patience; I cannot wait; I never could."

There came over the brightness of Janet's face a little pain, the shadow of those long years of patience, and toil. "It is a long, hard lesson to learn," she said, and Wealthy Dana knew from her voice and face that she was speaking from experience.

And there came a generous pity into the singular attraction which she experienced toward Janet, a pity which touched very nearly on reverence or awe; for Wealthy Dana's instincts were fine and true, where they had not been perverted by her education. After a few moments she spoke again.

"I have only confessed a part of my thoughts. The rest was more personal; I was fancying to myself what kind of friend you would make, and something beyond that."

"What kind of a friend!" repeated Janet, perplexed.

"Yes! one of the kind we read about, but find so seldom in the world—a friend true, steadfast, faithful, through good or evil, to the core."

"Is that the way in which you read me, Miss Dana?" her voice agitated with surprise.

"Just so; am I not true?"

"I believe fickleness is not one of my faults; but with regard to my capacity for any friendship, it has had very little opportunity to manifest itself; I believe that dear Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys are the only ones who have ever really tested it, or even cared to."

"Won't you add my name to that of my cousins?" asked

Wealthy Dana softly, almost timidly.

Janet did not answer at once; the request took her so much by surprise. She looked at Wealthy Dana, sitting there in her proud beauty, lazily guiding the boat along the banks, and the contrasts in their two lives came up sharply before her. What tribute could she bring from her scanty stores to one whose years overflowed with every gift of this world—to whom living was merely an existence of luxury, enjoyment, beauty? All these thoughts, and much more, flashing swiftly through her mind, concentrated themselves in her answer:

"Miss Dana, you do not know what you ask. My friendship can do no good—be of no service to you." And, unconscious of it herself, a little proud humility just touched her words.

"I never sought anybody's before—I should not yours, Miss Janet, if you were not so wholly unlike any one whom I ever met. I cannot tell what has impelled me to almost solicit what should be a free gift, without invitation, or bribe of speech. But I have had a feeling all the last hour that I should like to hear your voice tell me that you were my friend,

in your grave, earnest way, knowing that with you the words would reach more and deeper than they do with most young ladies of your age and mine."

The heart of Janet Strong thrilled at these words. She leaned forward and said softly, and half under her breath, as though she was making a solemn covenant: "Miss Dana, I will be your friend."

This time Wealthy Dana did not answer with words. She drew off her finger a gold ring, in which gleamed a single large emerald, and placed it on Janet's, saying only: "It shall stand for a sign and witness betwixt us."

Before Janet could answer, Maude, who had at last tired of playing with the water, and had listened to the conversation with a vague comprehension of its meaning, broke in with:

"I think you are funny, cousin Wealthy."

"If you do, keep your thoughts to yourself, child."

Janet's rapid apprehension assured her that this remark was not intended for Maude alone; so she made no thanks for the ring, but they were none the less vocal to the heart of Wealthy Dana.

The boat went slowly homeward. On their way they rested amidst a surf of water-lilies—the great snowy blossoms making the air heavy with their luscious perfume.

Miss Dana suggested that they should gather some of these, and carry them home as trophies of their journey.

"I think that this has been one of the happiest afternoons of my life," said Wealthy Dana, as she put out once more into the river.

"You spoke my thought at that moment," said Janet. "But for you—it can't be possible that you really mean it."

"Yes I do, decidedly. I know very well what you think, Miss Janet—that my life of gayety and pleasure, and all sorts of fashionable frivolity, has feasted and satisfied me. But you are mistaken. There are times when the thought of my wasted, aimless days, saddens and humiliates me, and I really wonder what I am living for."

This then had come at last in words to the surface. This was the secret of Wealthy Dana's attraction to Janet. Some higher instinct of her nature had discerned and did homage to whatever there was of right aspiration and true purpose in the life of the young governess.

For the first time it flashed across the latter's thoughts that she might be of some "service" to the young heiress. There she sat, with her large wealth, with her wide social influence, with her singular charm of speech and manner—with unusual powers and opportunities for doing good in her day and generation.

"It might be"—Janet's thoughts went softly and solemnly out on this new channel—"that there was some ministration appointed her in this new friendship," and she answered very gravely at last :

"A life like yours, Miss Dana, without any discipline of sorrow and struggle, is like a fairy tale to me, or like some enchanted country, on whose borders I can only stand, looking off on shining paths, on the joy of flowers, and glory of trees, in which I have no part." But her face kindled, although its gravity did not diminish: "I believe that sooner or later all loss and grief will be made up to me, in this world or another."

"And for you, Janet, you are trying to live for that other world?"

"I am trying to, God helping me," said Janet.

Just then the boat reached the steps which led up from the water to the bank. The sultry day had faded into twilight now. A light breeze from the sea cooled the hot pulses of the air. Voices from the house came down to the river.

"We will each take a share of the spoils," said Wealthy, breaking the silence in which they had landed; and they gathered up the flowers, which filled the air with their passionate odor.

The family was assembled on the veranda, and Guy Humphreys hailed the girls as they came up through the winding paths, and protested that they ought to be led out to decapitation at once, for stealing his boat, and ravaging his waters.

"But our slaughter was confined to the water-lilies," laughed Janet, "and we have brought them home to grace your halls, and parlors, with their perfume and beauty."

"That speech shall buy your forgiveness; only the next time that you seize my boat and scour my waters for booty, just please to invite me to accompany you. If I share in the spoils of the expedition, I must in its dangers."

"Besides," struck in Evelyn, "we doubted your capacity

to manage the boat, and feared you had all gone, crew and freight, to the bottom, and were about having the river dragged, weren't we, mamma?"

Thus appealed to, the elder matron answered the younger one.

"I must confess to a slight uneasiness during the last hour."

"Oh, mamma, you are so obstinately literal. I do love to touch up my speech with a little color of pathos and tragedy."

And so, with light jest and talk, as was the fashion with these people, they went out to supper.

## CHAPTER XIII.

FOR a week there were no new arrivals. Wealthy and Janet were thrown constantly together, and each brought gifts to this new friendship from her treasures of heart and soul. Janet, with her quick powers of assimilation, was stimulated and improved in various ways by the society of the accomplished and high-bred girl, and the young governess did not suspect that her influence reached deeper and wider than her friends.

There were many points, too, in which their tastes harmonized. With both of them, their fondness for natural scenery amounted to a passion—both of them had a keen enthusiasm and a fine discrimination in poetry—so, unlike as their educations had been, they both met on broad grounds of sympathetic appreciation.

At the close of the week a new guest entered the charmed circle. He was a classmate of Guy Humphreys. He arrived only a couple of days after his letter, in which he announced his intention of visiting Woodleaf.

"He was one of the smartest fellows in the class, but dreadfully lazy," Guy said, "and sowed his wild oats all through his college years, always getting into scrapes, and giving the faculty more trouble than any other member of the class. Ralph Brainerd was sure to be on hand if there was a hen-roost to be robbed, or a tutor's window to be smashed, or a gate to be carried off, or a watermelon patch to be devastated. In short, he was always the ringleader of any mischief that was going on, and he had a genius for getting his neck out of all responsibility in the matter that was marvelous. Many a fellow had been suspended, or expelled for a tenth part of what Ralph Brainerd had done, but he could always invent a story to suit his own case, and make one believe it almost against the evidence of his own eyes."

Mr. Humphreys added further, that he had lost sight of his classmate for some eight years, during most of which time, *he had been abroad*, he believed.

"I hope he has got through sowing his wild oats by this time," said Mrs. Winchester, on whom Guy's story had not made an altogether favorable impression of his classmate.

"Probably he has, mother. The best and wisest men often have their season of youthful folly and effervescence."

Somebody else took up the thread of conversation here, and there was no more said at that time of Guy's friend, Ralph Brainerd.

Two days later the new guest presented himself—a striking man in all respects, hardly above medium height, of a strong but flexible figure, and a face that interested you at the first glance. It was somewhat dark and thin, with keen, brilliant eyes, and a mouth that had much decision and some lurking satire in it—a man not easily penetrated, self-assured, brilliant, fascinating, with a great deal of a certain kind of intellectual power.

Ralph Brainerd made himself at home at once with his old classmate. His conversations were what women who talked impulsively, and on the surface of things, called "bewitching." He was a man of swift observations, a reader of the faults and foibles of men and women, of immense tact, and one who always knew how to address the vulnerable side of those with whom he was brought in contact. Then he had traveled long and widely. He was familiar with every climate, with the habits and national character of almost every nation on the face of the earth, and he had a wonderful faculty of "word painting," of seizing the ludicrous or picturesque side of any circumstance, and setting it before his hearers like a living reality, with his strong, vital words. Indeed, his power of language amounted almost to genius, and this was combined with a cultivation and courtliness of manner, with an easy, off-hand grace of presence and movement, which made Ralph Brainerd a favorite with all kinds of people. The ladies were charmed with him. I know of no word which expresses so fitly the degree, and kind of admiration which he inspired, before he had been two days an inmate of the country seat of the Humphreys.

What pictures of the Old World would rise up, and throb in living glory and beauty, along the paths of this man's speech! How great cities would stand in their stateliness and splendor before the gaze of his audience! The awful grandeur of the Pyramids; the crumbling ruins of ancient

temple, and tower, and palace; the gray desert stretching vast, and lonely on every side; great tropical forests, with their luscious fragrance, and palpitating life, would each in turn burn and gleam along the background of Ralph Brainerd's talk; and tropical birds would flash their fiery beauty through the air, and the cry of wild beasts would thrill its fierce wrath through lonely jungles; and a few minutes later, the listeners would all be mingling in the bustling, picturesque life of some foreign port, or fairly convulsed with laughter over some grotesque feature, or comical story, which the masterly words of Ralph Brainerd threw out to them.

Janet, like all the others, was completely taken captive by this man's talk. It fascinated, absorbed her. She gave herself up to its influence without question or analysis. A new world, which books only dimly revealed, on a sudden opened itself to her. She let Ralph Brainerd carry her where he would; into the voluptuous softness of Oriental atmospheres; into the sunny splendor of the Tropics; into the strange, wild, tingling life of the desert—breaking in occasionally with eager, rapid questions, which the man seemed to relish, for he knew his power and enjoyed it.

But Ralph Brainerd's talk did not always take so wide a range. He had a graceful way of saying small things, and placing common ones in new and attractive lights. His art in paying compliments was marvelous. They always lingered with their faint, dainty spice of flattery, like a pleasant perfume in the memory.

He was an interesting companion, too, in a walk, or ride, or sail; nothing was too slight to escape his attention nor the transfiguration of his words. He had a fine taste for art, an appreciative one for nature; and the young ladies found him a great accession to these rambles, in which the whole family now took part.

Several days had gone by on smooth, swift wings, which made them seem hardly more than an hour. The gentlemen were enjoying their newspapers and Havannas in the library. The ladies were gathered in the sitting-room, busy and merry over a basket of mosses, which the little party had gathered the day before in the woods, and Mrs. Humphreys had suggested that they should make a basket of these mosses for her mother to carry back to her city home.

"You must hang it in your own room, and it will be a suggestion all winter, of summer woods, and birds, and

flowers, and all the beautiful things you will leave behind when you return to your cell of brick and mortar."

"Mrs. Winchester, do I hear aright? Your elegant city home compared to a cell! How can you sit calmly there?" interposed Wealthy Dana.

Mrs. Winchester's indignation seemed in a nascent state that morning, if one were to judge from the indulgent smile with which she looked toward her daughter.

"Evelyn must have been born with a natural tendency toward exaggeration in all her talk. It was amusing in her childhood, when I should have repressed it. But it is too late for that now."

"Now, when it is wicked, instead of amusing, do you mean, mamma?"

"Not quite so bad as that, my dear, I hope!"

"Miss Janet," said Mrs. Humphreys, turning to the young lady, who was engrossed in the mosaics of mosses on all sides of her, "you are our authority on all moral questions."

"I never suspected it before, Mrs. Humphreys."

"Probably not! Your modesty on all occasions equals your merits. There, don't blush now. I am aware that was a very pretty compliment. But do you really think that there is any harm in saying funny, and foolish things that one doesn't mean?"

"In calling your mother's house a cell, for instance? I don't think that there was any moral wrong in that."

"No! my question took a wider range. Don't you think it quite harmless to jest on any subject where, of course, no one is pained, or injured, and no evil, only a little fun, is intended, by people who have the keen sense of the ridiculous that I have?"

"I hardly know," answered Janet, gravely, "for I have never sufficiently considered the subject. But I am certain that sacred things are not legitimate objects of ridicule."

"Mr. Brainerd won't agree with you there," subjoined Miss Dana. "Do you remember, Evelyn, the way he repeated that old preacher's prayer at the camp-meeting? Wasn't it funny?"

The trio of ladies laughed heartily at the recollection.

"You would join us, Janet, if you hadn't missed it, being off somewhere with Maude," said Mrs. Humphreys. "I'll ask him to repeat it for your especial benefit."

"Oh, no; please do not!" with great earnestness.

"Why—why not?"

"Because, Mrs. Humphreys, I do not think that any man's prayers are more a legitimate subject for ridicule than my own are. They are sacred, as betwixt him and his Maker."

"But don't you see the distinction? We were not laughing at what was either sincere or 'sacred' in the old man's prayer, but at his crude, clumsy, funny way of speaking; and that is all legitimate, and *you* could not have helped laughing too."

"Very likely not. But that cannot alter my conviction that it is wrong to jest on sacred things, to diminish their importance and power over us, by giving them grotesque associations in our own minds. This man's prayer, no matter how ignorant or awkward, nor how offensive many of its expressions to all good taste, was, in its deepest sense, a matter to him of life and death. I should be afraid to ridicule it."

"I think Miss Janet is right," said Mrs. Winchester. "We can hardly expect, however, that Mr. Brainerd would regard these things as important. His wide travel has made him hold very liberal, if not absolutely, loose religious opinions! I suspect they are tintured with German philosophy."

The dinner suddenly closed this conversation, but a new doubt and perplexity had been sprung in Janet's mind. She had yielded herself unquestioning to the magnetic influence of Ralph Brainerd. She was peculiarly susceptible to graces of manner and gifts of conversation like this man's. He had held her in enthusiastic admiration for days. Her conscience had never once signaled to her the necessity of analyzing the nature of this man's influence, and searching whether it was altogether a healthful one. Do not mistake me here. He had as yet only pleased her fancies; he had not reached her heart. But now she began to ask herself what lay beyond the bright wreaths, and festoons of his talk. Did they rest on pillars of solid principle, and true purpose, or were they only the graceful drapery around waste, and barrenness, and ruin? In what moral climate did this man's soul habitually dwell? The more she questioned the more troubled she became. She recalled now that first impression of him. She had been reading recently a life of Aaron Burr, and during her first interview with Ralph Brainerd,

the thought of the former would constantly recur to her mind. But the impression had been lost sight of in their subsequent acquaintance.

She told herself now that she was unjust to Ralph Brainerd, to admit for a moment any suspicion of the man's moral integrity, and yet, when she tried to fortify herself against these suspicions, by recalling some expression on his part, that indicated either love of truth, or reverence of right, none presented itself. In all that eloquent, bewitching talk, he had never once recognized God in the earth. Did he scoff at these things? Was the soul underneath that polished manner, that felicitous talk, the hard and barren soul of a confirmed skeptic? Beneath this man's character rolled there the dark and mighty river of selfishness and sin?

With a shudder Janet Strong asked herself these questions. With a shudder she put them away from her. Guy Humphreys and his father-in-law, and both were good judges of men, had no suspicions of this kind, she knew; neither had Mrs. Winchester, nor her daughter, nor Wealthy Dana, all of whom had so much wider acquaintance with, and doubtless so much better knowledge of human nature than herself.

"It must be that I am a fool—a poor, ignorant, little fool!" smiling half-drearly to herself; but those stubborn instincts of hers were on the alert, and she walked in a higher moral atmosphere than the cultivated men, and women about her; and when Ralph Brainerd was summoned there, the true features of his character disclosed themselves as they could not in a lower one.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"ISN'T this too bad?" said Wealthy Dana.

"Yes, it is quite too bad!" echoed Mrs. Humphreys.

Both of the ladies stood by the front windows, both of them drummed with idle fingers on the great panes, and looked out with no welcome in their gaze on the face of a day that was not yet three hours old. Warm, boding clouds covered the sky, the great, slow drops had begun already to wrinkle the window glass—there was not a solitary break or lift in the gray padding of cloud which stretched from east to west. The wind blew warm and damp from the south-east. There was no prospect of a sunbeam that day.

"Can't you make up your minds to it, and take it philosophically, ladies?" asked Mr. Humphreys, as he came into the sitting-room with his father-in-law and Mr. Brainerd, for the breakfast was over now, and the gentlemen had lingered half an hour, as was their habit, over the papers.

Mrs. Humphreys turned toward them, her fair face clouded with disappointment:

"No," she said. "Philosophy's a virtue quite beyond any heights to which I aspire. I had laid such delightful plans for this day, and for all of us, out in the woods, and had improvised such a charming little gipsy encampment, and now this miserable rain must turn up and spoil it all!"

I am sorry to say there was undisguised ill humor in Mrs. Humphreys' face, and tones.

"You look at me, my dear, as though I were in some way responsible for the rain, and I appeal to the present company, to acquit me of all complicity in the matter. Had I the appointing of this day, not a solitary cloud should have darkened the sky from 'morn to dewy eve!'"

"Nobody thinks that you are responsible for the rain, but you are for being a false prophet, and you told me last evening, half a dozen times, that you felt sure it would be pleasant, and compelled me to retire half an hour earlier than

usual, in order to be bright for the day's excursion. I shall never again have the slightest faith in your prescience about the weather, Guy Humphreys."

"Come, come, my dear," said Mrs. Winchester, who still retained the maternal prerogative of admonishing her daughter, and who was slightly disturbed at her display of petulance, "if you must have clouds outside, I hope that you will not heighten their effect by bringing them in-doors, also."

"Where are my clouds, mamma?" with that swift, bright change of tone, and manner, which was always charming in Evelyn Humphreys.

"They were in your face a moment ago, dark and lowering."

"I wish, however, Mrs. Winchester," said Mr. Brainerd, who never lost an opportunity of paying a graceful compliment, and who always seemed to be inspired at just the right moment, "that it was in our power to dispel the clouds outside as swiftly, and with sunshine half as bright as your daughter has hers."

"There!" exclaimed Evelyn, tossing her head triumphantly, "I'm very glad that I looked cross just now, because of that pretty, perfumy bit of flattery you have just offered up to—"

"Let me finish the sentence," laughed the lady's husband—"to your vanity!"

Mr. Brainerd found another agreeable opportunity to interpose here.

"That would not be true, old friend and classmate, for if Mrs. Humphreys possesses that attribute she has never discovered it to me; and it is, moreover, a quality to which I never bring offerings of approval, or praise under any circumstances."

All this was light talk, touching to a superficial observer no secret spring of motive, or character, and yet reaching both, for one who had keen insight to discern it; and into the midst of it all came Janet Strong, with no cloud in her face, although for her too the day had not fulfilled much bright anticipation.

"Here's one person that looks happy if it does rain!" interposed Wealthy Dana.

"And very seldom looks any other way," kindly added Mrs. Winchester.

"I wonder how it looked when she first glanced out of the window and saw the clouds this morning!" said Mrs. Humphreys.

"Not very happy, I'm afraid," answered Janet, with her little quaint smile.

"What was your first thought—your first words on seeing the rain? Tell us, do, Miss Janet," said Wealthy.

"Yes," echoed Mrs. Humphreys. "I want to hear it. It was something characteristic, I am certain."

"Please to excuse me—it wasn't worth repeating," with a faint color in her cheeks.

But the attention of the family was concentrated now on Janet, for they were in that idle mood when one's interest is easily stimulated, and there was no eluding their importunity. The ladies and gentlemen all insisted on hearing Janet's salutation to the rainy day, so she was fairly coerced into answering them.

"I was confident that it rained," she said, "before I looked out, for there is a certain friendly little sunbeam that is always sure on pleasant mornings to be glinting up and down my bed-post by six o'clock, and persuading me off my pillow, and the two often have a hard struggle for me. This morning the sunbeam was not there, but I was up notwithstanding; and when I put aside the curtains and looked out of the window, I knew our day in the woods was all over, and those two lines of Longfellow's, which you, Mr. Humphreys, were reading to us last night, came back to me, and I found myself repeating them:

'Into each life some rain must fall,  
Some days be dark and dreary.'

And so I tried to fortify myself against the disappointment with the philosophy done up in this bit of poetry."

"There! didn't I tell you that it would be something quaint and characteristic!" Mrs. Humphreys appealed triumphantly to the rest of the company. "I should never have thought or said *that* to myself."

"It was equally sensible and poetical. I do not know which quality to admire more," subjoined the host.

"And did it help you to bring down that happy face into the midst of our cloudy ones?" asked Miss Dana.

"I did not observe any 'cloudy one,'"

"The rain is increasing," said Mr. Winchester, as he

turned from the window where he had been making some atmospherical observations, which, indeed, had been quite the fashion that morning. "Now as we are effectually besieged in here by the rain for this day, I propose that we each make an especial effort to have the hours as pleasant and merry as possible, and entertain no hankерings after the woods, or memory of our disappointment. That is the way in which prisoners usually managed to pass the time during the 'Reign of Terror.'"

"And their quarters and circumstances were somewhat less exhilarating than ours, father?" laughed his son-in-law.

"Slightly, Guy! but before we discuss that question, we will make our plans for the day, and each shall propose whatever suggests itself as best suited to the general amusement."

Each one had some little pet plan, none of which, however, amounted to much, such as a game of dominoes, reading a play of Shakspeare's, or to improvise some tableaux for which Mrs. Humphreys had a pretty faculty. When it came Janet's turn, however, she suggested one of Mr. Brainerd's stories of his travels, in which the rest all concurred.

There was a little bustle of preparation before they seated themselves to listen to Mr. Brainerd. Some of the ladies started for crotchetting, and like affectations of employment.

Wealthy Dana, too, started in quest of something of this sort, but paused at the piano and ran her fingers over the keys, from which a weird, mournful, prophetic air moaned, and sobbed, and fled away, and returned, and wandered up and down the room.

Janet, returning from her chamber with her sewing, found Wealthy standing here with her face in a shadow of thoughtfulness and sadness.

"Oh, dear!" said the young governess, "there are tears in your very tune, my friend. I hope you are not lamenting for the lost sunshine of this day," and she drew her arm around Wealthy's waist, for the young girls had grown into a certain familiarity of speech and manner which was not of that kind which "breeds contempt."

"No, not for that. But I was thinking of your words this morning, and so my thoughts and my music drifted into this minor key, and you are responsible for them. Do you believe that is truth which our poet says, or only poetry, *Miss Janet?*"

"I think it must be both in a world like ours; how can it be only poetry?" said Janet, softly.

"But," said Wealthy, eagerly, "there have never any 'rains fallen into my life,' nor any days been 'dark or dreary,' that it would not be hyperbole to call this. Do you suppose that they are all to come?"

She asked the question with a singular earnestness and gravity. Janet looked at her too, and wondered with a kind of sorrowful wonder.

"There may be exceptions to the rule," she said. "I wish from my heart that yours may be one of these cases, my dear girl. But I suppose it is not the best way to look at sorrow and pain, with a weak, childish dread of them. You know God sends these to our lives, as he does the rains to the year, to soften, and refresh, and fructify our souls. I think in the end, we are, or surely ought to be, better and happier for our discipline—our 'rains,' and our 'days dark and dreary.'"

"I wonder if all these would make me a better woman!" softly said Wealthy; and looking up in her face, Janet saw the tears shining in her dark eyes.

There was another person who had listened to this conversation with a keen interest—indeed, the most trivial things had an importance for Ralph Brainerd—nothing escaped him. He believed that all kinds of knowledge, sooner or later, had some value; would be in some sense available to him who knew how, and when to use it. He happened to be standing in an alcove shielded by the heavy drapery when Wealthy Dana had entered, and as she did not detect his presence, he had not discovered it to her, but stood quietly listening to the music until Janet returned, and so he had overheard the conversation, which, although not strictly personal, was certainly intended for no third person, and it was somewhat remarkable that with Mr. Brainerd's punctilious sense of honor in trifles, that he did not betray his proximity to the ladies. But at that moment Mrs. Winchester put her head inside the door, and summoned the young ladies, and after they had passed out one way, the gentleman disappeared by another, but there was a smile on his lips, accented by some irony or contempt, which gave a hard, disagreeable expression to the face of Ralph Brainerd.

It seemed to his small audience that the young man surpassed himself this morning. He had never been quite so

brilliant, so picturesque, so vivid; never quite so happy in illustration, so felicitous in quotations; never had just such delicate touches of satire, such fine appreciation of the ludicrous, such wit and humor, surprised them, as they followed him through the broad highways, or down the pleasant by-paths of his speech. They sat—men and women—fairly magnetized under it, and if Mr. Brainerd's design had been to obey Mr. Winchester's suggestions, and persuade the thoughts of the company from their disappointment, he succeeded perfectly.

The rain fell with a still, dead steadiness outside, the great woolly clouds padded themselves thicker and darker over the sky, but not one of the small circle in the sitting-room knew or cared for this.

Ralph Brainerd had a store of ancient legends, poems, and traditions; then he had one of those marvelous memories which never failed him in smallest detail of date or name. He had visited, too, most of the famous historical localities in Europe, and with his richly stored mind, and wonderful descriptive powers, he photographed the deeds, and persons, and places for his audience.

And Janet sat and listened with lips slightly apart, with the eager light in her dark-blue eyes, and the faint color going and coming in her cheeks, and she forgot all her fears, and suspicions of this man, as a wiser woman would have been likely to do, hearing his talk.

But they came back to her with a new force before the morning was over, and held her thereafter. Mr. Brainerd had been describing a six weeks' tour which he had taken the preceding summer through the south of France.

The delightful climate, the picturesque peasantry, their marked national character and social life, and the scenery, bounded by the Rhone on one side and mountain ranges on the other, had all, more or less, been rapidly struck out by the speaker, when Guy Humphreys suddenly broke in here:

"You were on sacred historical ground, too, Brainerd. How those pleasant valleys and plains of fair Languedoc were reddened all over with the martyr fires of the thirteenth century."

"Yes," responded the guest, "bigotry, superstition, and ecclesiastical tyranny raged, worse than fiends, through all that fair garden of Southern France. I thought of it as I walked over the stones which had witnessed so many a sick-

ening *au-to-da-fe* in the early teens of the Christian era, and I said to myself, what wrong, and misery that mysterious element in human nature called superstition, fanaticism, religion, as you will, has wrought for the sons and daughters of men!" .

Janet's course of reading happened to lie at this time in the path of the thirteenth century. She had been deeply stirred with the history of the Albigensian crusade, and had entered with keen sympathy into the religious struggle which marked for France, the first epoch of free inquiry among her peoples. Her interest in this period, and the great principles involved in the war, fairly carried her out of herself into her subject, and she had not detected the contempt of all religious faith which lurked in Ralph Brainerd's remark; so somewhat to his surprise she answered him :

"And what gladness, and gratitude you must have experienced, in contrasting that age and this, and seeing how at last, through all those seas of blood, and fires of martyrs, through all the anguish and rage and persecution, the truth had triumphed at last, for a part of the world, at least; coming, as you did, too, from a land which has so nobly vindicated her right to worship God according to the free conscience of her peoples?"

It was not like the little governess to make herself prominent in any talk. Her auditors looked at each other with a pleased surprise. Mr. Brainerd smiled, but some expression mingled with the smile, which Janet could not penetrate.

"I am afraid, my dear young lady," he said, "that my thoughts would hardly sound so charmingly enthusiastic as yours. Travel does not make a man less patriotic, I trust; but it does more liberal, more cosmopolitan, in religion, as in everything else. It takes off the edge of that narrow nationality, which finds perfection only in one's own country, and her institutions, although it is not necessary to say that this last remark applies solely to my own sex."

"I did not appropriate it in any sense," answered Janet Strong, with lips that just touched a smile, and then settled into their earnest line again. "I can understand," she continued, "how the wide travel of which you speak must enlarge and liberalize a man, but it surely will not make him less swift to discern the truth, or require him to hold it with less fidelity."

"Miss Strong, will you tell me what truth is?" asked Mr. Brainerd.

"I mean," answered Janet, "the one true religion!"

"I understand you; but will you tell us what this one true religion is?"

"It is the faith which I hope we all hold, and that we find in God's Holy Word," speaking softly and reverently now.

"I do not dispute it; only every other age, and every other people have believed that they too, and they only, have found this true religion; and have held it with a fidelity, and defended it with a tenacity great as our own, through every danger, and hardship, and peril. The devotee who throws himself under the car of the Juggernaut, the Inquisitor who kindled those terrible martyr-fires which burn lurid along the path of the thirteenth century, all believed they were cheating the devil, and doing God service."

The smile was on the speaker's lips, the eloquent voice lent some additional authority to the words, and yet some swift, subtle instinct gave Janet warning of the cold, hard irony that grated through all.

"But we do know that neither devotee nor inquisitor had the one true religion, for sacrifice to idols, and fires of persecution are directly opposed to its spirit!" continued the governess.

"I agree with you about the heathen devotee and the Spanish inquisitor. But what shall we say for the Church of England in the seventeenth century? And then our own Puritan fathers whipped the Quakers, and hung the witches, and their faith is what most of us hold this day, as the one only true and righteous."

"But these things were the fault and sin of the age, of that very bigotry and superstition which the religion of our fathers condemned. We worship their God—we hold their Saviour still as the only salvation of a lost and sinful world, and yet we do not copy their example in bigotry and persecution!"

"No; but is that to be ascribed to our religion, or to the finer, more enlightened age in which we live? Cultivation, mental and social, enlarges the head and softens the heart; and I attribute to our civilization, rather than to our creed, the change in our method of promulgating it. Fagot

and sword would shock the sentiment of the nineteenth century."

Janet's heart sank within her. She could not answer this man, but she knew in her soul that his arguments were all sophistical. None of the others came to her aid. They would doubtless have, in a general way, agreed with her; but they supposed that Mr. Brainerd did likewise, and was merely talking for the sake of drawing the quiet little governess out, which they were perfectly willing he should do.

"But, excuse me, I do not want to misapprehend you on so vital a point; you believe, at least, that we have the true faith; however imperfectly we or our fathers have exemplified it in our lives?" said Janet, and the earnestness in her voice amounted almost to pain.

"Excuse me there, Miss Janet. I never enter into an argument on that subject. Carlyle says, 'all women are natural worshipers,' and in your sex reverence is a virtue as well as a picturesque element which I admire; indeed, I could never love a woman in whom it did not exist."

At this moment the lunch bell rang. Janet gathered up her embroidery as the other ladies did theirs, exclaiming at the brevity of the morning; and she overheard Mr. Brainerd say to Mrs. Winchester, as he waited on the matron to the table:

"What a pretty little enthusiast Miss Strong is!"

Janet's suspicions would not be laid asleep now. Was this man, with all his varied gifts and marvelous cultivation, without hope or faith in God? Was religion to him a pretty superstition, fit for women and children, for the weak and the ignorant? Had he no belief in a life beyond the grave; and more than all this, did he scoff in his secret soul at all truth, and purity, and goodness? Was there to him no meaning in prayer, no power in faith and love, in sacrifice for others, nor service for God?

Were all these things to him like the pretty absurd legends which inlaid his talk so often? Janet's soul did not cease to ask these questions, as she mingled in the social hilarity with which they kept the rainy hours of the summer afternoon.

She had learned few arts of concealment, and her face was apt to bear its testimony to her thoughts. It carried some inward seriousness through all the rest of the day, although she took her part in the general festivities.

Late in the afternoon she was standing alone in an alcove of the library, while the rest of the party was absorbed in a portfolio of rare engravings, which had recently been sent to Mr. Humphreys from Europe. Mr. Brainerd had thrown a swift glance once or twice in her direction, and at last he turned suddenly from the party which had congregated around the table, and were in a state of explosive delight over the exquisite landscapes, and he came to Janet's side, saying with that abruptness, which in Ralph Brainerd never seemed rude:

"Miss Strong, what have you been thinking about me?"

Quite startled at the question, Janet asked, with a blush which convicted her:

"You must prove to me first how you came to be so certain of the subject of my thoughts."

"That is by no means a difficult matter. I have found your eyes following me half a dozen times this afternoon, with a doubtful, perplexed look, which assured me that I was the unworthy subject of your passing meditations. Won't you interpret the thought which lay far down behind that look?" he asked, half playfully, half earnestly.

"Shall I?" asked Janet, in the same manner.

"I have said, 'Please, will you?'"

She was naturally frank, and outspoken, and no false standards of polite society had made her otherwise, so she answered this man as hardly a woman in the world would have done.

"I must have been wondering in those moments, just how much you meant of what you said to me this morning—how much you believed, and how much you doubted!"

"In short, Miss Janet, you want to penetrate me—to find out what sort of man I am."

"Yes; that is it," with the fearless sincerity which had nothing to conceal. "You perplex me."

A small Parian vase stood by the window, and over it some fuschia dropped their scarlet flames. Ralph Brainerd lifted one of these, and laid it, with a light, half reverent touch, against the soft brown hair by his side.

"I am very much flattered, Miss Janet, to find that I am the subject of this slight passing interest on your part. I am a man easy to apprehend, with no disguises of any sort. You will not find it difficult to explore me."

*Ralph Brainerd knew when he spoke these words that he*

was uttering a lie, and despite himself there was a certain hard dissent in his tones, which grated along some alert intuition of Janet Strong's, and a little contemptuous satire pointed his smile. Janet shook her head a little sadly, not conscious that she did it.

"What! your eyes hold a doubt in them? My talk this morning has made you fear that I am too liberal,—possibly a little loose in my theology, and that would be a crime of terrible magnitude in your thoughts! There is no bar before which I would not sooner be arraigned than that of a young and pretty saint."

It was impossible to resist a laugh, but Janet was in no wise satisfied. Ralph Brainerd knew it.

"You are acute in your intuitions of character, Miss Strong," he said, with an interest which this time was not assumed. "Do you always trust them?"

"Really, I never thought of the subject before," said Janet; "I hardly know."

"It is a singular fact that these intuitions in your sex amount sometimes almost to genius. I have known women occasionally, not remarkable for breadth of mind or cultivation of any sort, who seemed to have some delicate insight of character which rivaled the most astute student of human nature."

"I never suspected myself of possessing any such gift of insight," for in some sense the talk was getting beyond her depth now. Then Mr. Winchester called them to some view on the Rhine, and the conversation was ended.

But singular as it was, after this Ralph Brainerd never felt quite assured in the society of the little governess. It was a strange inconsistency in this man's character, that he was morbidly sensitive to the opinion of others, no matter how inferior he might regard them to himself, or of how little apparent importance their estimate of him might be. He had no fears that any other member of the cultivated and worldly-wise group at Woodleaf suspected him to be other than what he seemed—the high-souled and honorable gentleman. But had this little governess, with her earnest eyes and quiet thoughtfulness, seen deeper than they all?

And for Janet, the doubt and the fear of this man had grown into clearness now. She was conscious still of a certain power which he possessed over her, which, if she yielded

to it, which, indeed, if she did not struggle mightily against it, would draw her hopelessly within its influence. And she asked herself what would be the end of all this. Would not the foundations of her faith be broken up? Would not her trust in God, her hold on His promises, her belief in His love and care about her life, loosen themselves, day by day, and her soul go drifting out on a cold, dark sea of skepticism? She could not answer Ralph Brainerd, nor defend her faith with any arguments, but she could steel her heart against his sophistries, however fair and plausible they might seem. She would not give up her trust for the present, her hope for the future. She would not believe that there had been no Father's watchful care, and brooding love about all her lonely life, and that it was not His hand which had led her back softly from that awful peril which her feet had gone down in her girlhood. She would not confuse her mind, nor weaken her discrimination betwixt the true and the false, by entering the atmosphere of Ralph Brainerd's influence. As a little child, she would hold fast her faith, and her trust, seeking to do from her heart the will of God, for to such the promise had been, "Ye shall know of the doctrine."

It was after midnight when, in the silence of her own room, Janet rose up from the chair where she had held this long communion with her soul. The tears swam in her eyes as she drew aside the curtain and looked out on the night. The wind had changed. The clouds overhead had torn themselves apart, and into the deep blue gulf came the flocks of golden stars, and looked down on the sweet face lifted to them, and smiled solemn and steadfast.

"Nevertheless, He left not Himself without witness!" she murmured, and a new light came into her face which was fairer, if not brighter, than a smile, and Janet went to slumber that night deep and peaceful as a little child's.

## CHAPTER XV.

Two days later they went into the woods on the excursion which had been the subject of so many plans, and so much bright anticipation. The day was a perfect one; sunshine and sky, air and earth, made up one harmony of joy and beauty. The ripe summer sunshine poured its wine of gold over the earth, mellowed by the August heats. Out of the sky the day leaned tenderly over them, and faint winds from the sea cooled the air with their fragrance. They had selected for the day a wild, picturesque little valley, which dipped itself among the hills on either side. The great forest trees spread over it their blanket of thick foliage. With almost every step one came upon some new view, some charming surprise of landscape, some alluring perspective which would have thrilled an artist with inspiration.

On the southern slope of the valley the brook, which made a white fold among the green hills, gathered itself up and flung over the rugged rocks the smooth cambric of its waters, and the little waterfall was a perpetual voice of song in the valley, while below, the waters rounded themselves into a broad laugh, and a rustic foot-bridge added another picturesque feature to the view. Then on the left was a small lake, its cup of blue waters shut in by the hills, a very pearl of beauty, gathered into the heart of the landscape, and haunted by an echo, that sweet wandering spirit of sound.

And into this silence, and beauty that had waited long for human life and color, came, on this summer day, the household from the Woodleaf mansion, with spirits the lightest and gayest, and in that state of alert perception, and appreciation, when all grace and beauty are seen and recognized with a finer joy, and sense of possession.

Certainly that wild, silent cleft among the hills, which for so many years had put on and taken off its garments of beauty, for only the sweet singing birds to build their nests

and rejoice in, or haply to bring to some tired plowman a vague, inarticulate sense of loveliness as he paused with the load of wood he was wearily driving home, and took in the wild grace, and charm of the picture before him—certainly the wild, silent valley had its day of recognition at last.

The little company of men and women were fairly intoxicated with the beauty and freedom about them. The ladies were of course the most explosive in their admiration and interjections. They scattered themselves about, coming constantly on some new delight of picture, some rare forest flower, some dainty tint of stone or moss. They were all people in whom the sense of beauty was keen and deep; but there was one in this gay party who went about more quietly than the others, with a joy at her heart which hardly kept the tears from committing themselves to her eyes—one to whom this picture of earth, and water, and sky was a gift of the dear Father's. Every bird that sang, every bough that waved, was a voice or a witness of His love. All chill and darkness which had fallen into her heart fled away now, its secret places were full of reverence and praise. Ralph Brainerd would in his secret soul, she well knew, have sneered at all this; but his influence could not reach her now—he could not intermeddle with her joy.

They kept this day, much as you can imagine, knowing what sort of people they were, sometimes together, sometimes apart. They recited poems and sang old songs, they fished in the lake and wandered up and down its banks and about the fall, listening to the shout of its waters, and joining their own with it sometimes. They gathered flowers, and mosses, and berries; they went out sailing on the little cup of a lake, in a birch canoe, which Guy Humphreys had ordered made in Canada for this especial occasion; and the gentlemen caught trout in the waters, and helped the ladies improvise a fireplace, with plenty of mirth and a great deal of pretty awkwardness, on the part of the latter, and here they broiled the fish, and at last found a little cool, shady plateau where the branches shut their dark-green blinds overhead, and here they made their table of the grassy turf.

"I always fancied," said Mrs. Humphreys, raising her voice above the general key of hilarity about the table, "that I was born with a gipsy vein in me. What a charming, wild, picturesque life that people must lead, without a care in the world! I heartily wish we could stay here for-

ever with the birds. Guy could pitch a vast tent yonder, and swing hammocks from the branches, and we would fitly christen this new home of ours 'The Happy Valley.' "

And so speaking, Evelyn Humphreys sat before the coffee-urn, which had been imported from home that morning, while near at hand her husband was dissecting a pair of broiled chickens. Mr. Brainerd, Janet, and Miss Dana were absorbed in roasting corn over a fire of dried branches, and Mr. and Mrs. Winchester were occupied in unlading the baskets of their various edibles, for in projecting the excursion it had been stipulated that no servant should accompany the party. They would appropriate the toil as they did the pleasure.

"All that sounds very picturesque and enchanting, my dear; but how will your 'Happy Valley' look next January, when it is drifted with snows four feet deep, and the winds howl in the leafless branches? I'm afraid that your romance would vanish with the equinoctial storm, and you'd fervently advocate a return to civilization, and the evils of a comfortable home."

"Oh dear, Guy," tossing her head in affectation of anger, "you always contrive to blast all my little buds of fancy, with just such frosts as that. I didn't wish to be reminded, for this one day at least, that there were such things as winds, and snows, and bare branches in the world. Do hand me that plate of sandwiches and that raspberry jam. I must descend from my heights I see."

"But what a dreadful plunge, from poetry to potatoes!" added Mr. Brainerd, with a look of comic distress, at which the young ladies laughed gayly. "You have burned your ear of corn, Miss Strong."

"And my fork, too!" as she drew out of the bed of coals the rugged implement, which her companion had ingeniously improvised out of a branch of birch.

"No matter, I can furnish you another," springing up with agility, and in a moment presenting her with another branch, to which was appended a fresh ear of corn.

"Mine is burned too!" exclaimed Wealthy Dana. "How is it, Mr. Brainerd, that you are the only successful roaster amongst us? Your ears are always done to a crisp, most tempting brown, while ours are blackened, smoked, or scorched."

*"I have had a wider experience than you in this art dur-*

ing my travels. But there is a sort of 'luck' which controls that, as it does all affairs in life, from roasting to ruling. The fates have been propitious to me in the former matter."

"You believe in 'luck,' then, or in 'propitious fates,' which help one and defeat another?" said Wealthy Dana, whose earnestness often discovered itself, even in her lightest moods, in some question which went far beyond the surface of things.

"To a certain degree; but after all, a man makes himself, is his own fate, conquers his own destiny. Pardon me, Miss Strong, but that ear is in quite too close proximity with the coals."

"That is because another sort of ear is so intent on listening to you," laughed Wealthy, "and there is only a qualified, and dubious assent in her face."

"I thought an enthusiastic worshiper of all things grand and good must admire heroes—the men who have made their own destinies."

"So I do, Mr. Brainerd"—she stopped here.

"Don't, now, let the second thought hold back the conclusion of your sentence," pleaded Wealthy Dana.

"I believe that, under God, every man makes, or mars his own destiny."

"Miss Strong," said Mr. Brainerd, as he slipped another golden-brown ear off his fork, "I am afraid there is a straight road from that doctrine into fatalism."

"Oh no, sir; it leads directly past all such precipices to the safe anchorage of God's knowledge of, and agency in, all the affairs of those whom He has created."

"I see your priests and teachers have anchored you strongly in your creed."

A slight sarcasm touched the polished tones, and touched his smile too, with a very faint sneer. He did not for once see the shadow which fell into Janet's face, for he was intent on opening the bed of coals, but Wealthy Dana did.

The conversation was suddenly ended here by Mrs. Humphreys' lively voice, to whose hearing a few fragments of the conversation had floated:

"Come, dinner's all ready, and you people, who have always some grave theological or metaphysical problem to solve, must let all that go now. We can't summon you

'With the sound of a silver bell,'

having unhappily left that, with civilization and ceremony, at home."

"We shall not regret it, so long as we are summoned to the table by a voice sweeter than any

'Tongue of silver bell!'"

gracefully answered Mr. Brainerd, as he gave each of the ladies an arm.

For the next two hours the talk of course went right and left, touching a thousand subjects, and dwelling on none, as they lingered at their banquet in the woods. There was of course plenty of wit, and merriment to season the lunch, to which they brought appetites sharpened by exercise and mountain air, and sometimes, for a moment, the talk fell into a half serious mood, but did not rest there; some jest was sure to rally them out of it; for their hearts were light, like their faces.

"How quiet you are, Miss Janet!" exclaimed Mrs. Humphreys, near the close of the meal. "I should almost fear that you were not enjoying yourself to the height of the others, if your face did not absolutely contradict any such suspicion. It has been a picture of happiness all the morning."

"I am glad; then, *that* has spared the necessity of speech on the subject, for any words that I could find, would fall so very far short of translating my complete enjoyment of this day."

A little while later, as they were lounging on the grass after dinner, Wealthy Dana, who sat near Janet, turned to her suddenly, saying, in a low, confidential tone:

"What do you think of Mr. Brainerd, Miss Janet?"

"I think in many respects that he is above praise!"

"Excuse me; in what sort of respects?"

"Those which must be apparent to every one; his wonderful conversational powers, his fine cultivation, and tastes."

"Pick your way carefully among your adjectives, lest your conscience should protest against them, little lady!" said Wealthy, in that playful tone ~~which~~ she was quite in the habit of assuming with the governess. "Your compliments touch only the external, and do not reach anything beyond them."

"I have only known Mr. Brainerd a short time," said

Janet, half apologetically, a little startled, and annoyed at Wealthy's discerning so truly the inward meaning of her answer.

The young heiress twisted a few spires of the long grass gravely, and curled them in her small fingers.

"You do not like Mr. Brainerd, Miss Janet?" suddenly lifting her bright, large eyes to her companion.

"Oh, that is saying less, or more than the truth."

"Well, I mean not cordially, heartily. I have felt it for some time. You are afraid there is something wrong, erratic in his religious views. I have seen it in your face after you have had an argument with him. He does not possess your confidence in the same sense that my uncle and cousin do."

What could Janet say! Wealthy had put the case truly. Her face corroborated it.

"I am sorry to see this, my dear Miss Janet," continued the young lady, after a moment's silence; "because I think you misapprehend the true character of this man, and therefore cannot be in all respects quite just to him. He talks more lightly than he feels sometimes, but he is a man of fine and noble character."

"I hope it is true," said Janet, surprised at her companion's earnestness.

"But that is not saying you believe it is. I am not easily deceived by your speech, Miss Janet."

"Come, young ladies, we are all our own waitresses today," broke in again the lively voice of Mrs. Humphreys. "You must do your part in gathering up the dishes for the gentlemen to pack," and she produced several domestic aprons, and each of the ladies assumed one, and proceeded to her work, and in a short time the table was cleared, and they were ready for the afternoon's pleasure.

It was of a more desultory kind than the morning's had been. Mr. and Mrs. Winchester took a sail in the canoe. The young people scattered themselves along the shore of the lake; Janet seized one of the fishing lines and amused herself angling for trout; but it was her first essay in the art, and she was not successful; and half unconsciously, she turned into a little footpath which led off among the hills. After all, it was pleasant to be alone. She seemed to get a little closer to the warm, tender heart of nature than she could have done in the society of her friends, whose

light talk was always diverting her thoughts into other channels.

So she wandered on for an hour or two, finding at almost every step something to bring a new gladness into her eyes; now a small flame of scarlet berries, curling around the dead green leaves of wild creeper, and now some last year's nest, which had held a household of young robins somewhere, high up in the great boughs overhead, and which had been shaken off by the fierce hands of some spring gale, and the homestead of the robins was now only a little cup of faded and matted grass.

As Janet was stooping to gather the nest up, her attention was suddenly arrested by the sound of voices at some distance on her right hand—low, pleasant voices, which had a familiar sound. She suspected at once that some of her own party had wandered up from the lake into the woods, for it was by no means probable that there were any strangers in that vicinity. Voices in solitude always have a powerful magnetism. Janet obeyed it, without pausing to consider; and guided by the sound of the speakers, she made her way as she could through the thick underbrush, and came suddenly in sight of them, and so softly that they had no intimation of her presence.

A fine thread of a brook, unrolled from some small spring among the rocks, strung itself down over the stones a few feet in front of her, and beside the water lay the massive trunk of an oak which the wind had struck down, and over which there was a gray quilting of moss. And on the fallen trunk sat Ralph Brainerd and Wealthy Dana, absorbed in conversation. The young lady at that moment was searching with the ivory head of her parasol among the dead leaves at her feet, but there was a warm light glowing all over her face, which indicated some unusual life and pleasure on her part.

Mr. Brainerd sat close by her side; one hand was laid with a familiarity which really made it a caress, on her shoulder. The sight sent a pang so swift and bitter among Janet's thoughts, that she fairly ground her feet into the grass. She understood, then, how small her faith was, how deep and vital her doubts and fears were for this man, Ralph Brainerd. There came to her now, in a swift flash of conviction, the real meaning of Wealthy Dana's defense of him that day, and a thousand other little circumstances rose up to her memory,

and confirmed her suspicions that Ralph Brainerd was seeking to awaken an interest in the heart of the young heiress. What man would be more likely than he to succeed; what man could bring to the attempt more personal gifts, more graces of cultivation, more of those qualities which are likely to charm the imagination, and persuade the heart of a fine, high-souled nature like Wealthy Dana's, than Ralph Brainerd?

Janet knew her friend well enough to be certain that she was no flirt. Any familiarity of word or manner which she permitted to any gentleman, was an encouragement on her part, which it would not be with many women. And she had begun to feel, too, that Ralph Brainerd had some underlying motive in all he did. Wealthy Dana would be a woman whom any man would be proud to call his wife, and Ralph Brainerd's æsthetic tastes would make him exceedingly fastidious regarding the woman whom he honored with his hand. She was an heiress too. Mr. Humphreys had implied that his classmate had mostly run through with his fortune!

Janet's fondness for Wealthy Dana had increased with her doubts of Mr. Brainerd, and the thought that this man was seeking to win the heart of her friend had no pleasure, but much of fear and dread in it.

She had stolen noiselessly away from the pair who sat on the oak trunk, and kept on her path up through the woods; and the birds sang, and the day bloomed in beauty for her no longer. Her face fallen into a shadow, and drooped forward under her straw hat, the small bird's nest crushed in her hand, she went on her way through the deepening woods.

But she was sharply arrested. There was a quick crackling of the underbrush on Janet's right hand, which startled her into an involuntary cry, and then a man sprang out suddenly from among the trees, and confronted her. One swift, frightened glance took him in face and figure; a man so young that his lips were still beardless, stout and hardy, with a swarthy face, and large, coarse, but not uncomely features, nor lacking intelligence. The brown, large hands bore their own testimony of honest toil, and the coarse but comfortable clothing differed, in no respect, from that which the farmers in the vicinity wore to their every-day labor.

But under his thick light-brown hair the eyes of the young

man flashed at this moment with a hungry fierceness, and there was about the mouth, white, and set in deadly sternness, the look of one who had made up his mind to some deed, which stirred and concentrated every force of his nature; but the young face was, notwithstanding all this, neither hardened nor bad.

But the sight which blanched the cheek of Janet Strong was the gun which the man carried, clinched desperately in both hands; not that this necessarily afforded any grounds of suspicion; for the woods abounded in small game, which frequently attracted hunters at this season.

But if the young man's appearance had first given Janet cause for alarm, his manner, the next instant, underwent a striking change. He glanced into her face, and his swarthy one grew livid as with swift terror, his hand shook as he involuntarily lifted it to his eyes, as one would to shut out some specter which had arisen in his path—he fairly recoiled from her.

● A new fear smote Janet. This man might be a maniac. She was beyond the range of human ear or vision, and with a wild impulse, she turned to fly. In that brief moment, the stranger must have regained to some degree his self-composure. He shot after the flying girl a half doubtful, half wistful glance, and then stepping forward, called to her before she had gained half a dozen rods:

"Don't be frightened, ma'am; I was seeking for another person, and have no thought of harming you."

Janet's fears went down swiftly as they had arisen. That voice was its own faithful witness of sanity and honesty. It would not allow her to doubt or question. She paused and answered:

"There is no one, I believe, in this part of the woods, except the small party from which I have strayed."

The dark eyes of the youth shot out fiercely again. The look of deadly purpose settled the lines about his lips. He moved quickly close to her side.

"Is there a man by the name of Ralph Brainerd in your party?" he asked; and there was something in his voice when he uttered his name, which almost froze the blood in Janet's veins.

"He is—he was with us," she stammered.

"And he has gone off into the woods alone?" the light growing into a fierce exultation in his eyes.

"Oh, no; there is a young lady with him. Surely you do not mean harm to them?" her fears alert for Wealthy.

"I shall not harm 'them,'" with a grave accentuation of the latter pronoun, and the fierce look going down in his eyes. "I beg your pardon for my strange manner, ma'am," said the young man, with an earnest courtesy of manner which left no doubt of its genuineness. "When I first came upon you, your face and figure was so much like one I used to know, that it fairly took me aback. I see now that it isn't so like as I first thought; but it's strong, for all that. I beg your pardon again for havin' frightened you;" and shouldering his gun, the strange youth, whose life could not have ripened more than twenty years, plunged into the heart of the woods.

The shadows were growing about Janet; the afternoon must be nearly spent. She hurried down the sloping path which led to the lake, her thoughts crowded with vague surmises and fears, to which her recent strange encounter had given rise. It never once, however, struck her that the youth she had parted from, was seeking the life of his fellow-man. His face had impressed her with too favorable an opinion for such a dread to find lodgment in her thoughts; but she feared that there lay some dark sin at the door of Ralph Brainerd's soul, and that the stranger was seeking him with a challenge. It was singular that every hour seemed to inspire her with some new dread of this man!

When she reached the valley, she found the whole party assembled there; but Mr. Brainerd and Wealthy had only made their appearance a few moments in advance of herself.

"Babes in the Wood!" was Mrs. Humphreys' salutation. "I was just proposing to Guy that we should sound the horns and blow the trumpets, in order to find our lost children. Where have you been all alone, Miss Janet?"

"Up in the woods for a couple of hours. The stillness and wildness persuaded me; I stayed longer than I intended, and am sorry to find that my absence gave you a moment's solicitude."

"You shared it with this romantic young gentleman and lady, who have been talking sentiment to each other, up in some Dryad's bower, in the woods."

"Oh, Evelyn, your darts shoot right and left, but they never hurt anybody;" said Wealthy Dana, with a little laugh, and a faint blush.

Janet, however, could not help thinking that "dart" had hit very near the truth; but she kept this thought, like a good many others, to herself.

It was now only half an hour to sundown, and of course high time to think of returning. There was plenty of merry bustle and preparation before they started, and the stars were mustering their golden forces in the sky, by the time they emerged from the woods, and it was natural that the talk should drop away into silence, and the silence should break into a chorus of sweet songs from all, saving Janet, whom nature, nor cultivation had made a singer.

But she listened with a deep joy to the sweet old songs, as they poured into the heart of the still night, and watched the glimmer of the lights from the farm-houses along the road. The shadow dropped away from her heart, and a great peace and gladness filled it. "Wealthy has a great many to love and admire her," she murmured to herself; "but perhaps there is nobody in the world to pray for her—nobody but I!"

At last the carriage wound through the great gate, and up the winding road to the house.

"Have you had a happy day in the woods, Miss Wealthy?" asked the sweet voice of Janet, as they alighted.

"Oh, yes, so happy that I shall never forget it."

## CHAPTER XVI.

IT was two weeks later. During this time the attentions of Mr. Brainerd to Miss Dana had been of so significant a character that they were apparent to every member of the household, and were, of course, made the subject of a good deal of courteous banter, by the light-hearted people there.

It was hard for Janet to witness all this—to feel that her friend's interest was inevitably drifting, day by day, into tenderness for a man whose principles, and whose real moral character the little governess seemed to discern more and more clearly. He grew a little bolder, in his half-concealed sneers at religion, at the Bible, at all things pure and sacred; and yet he always covered his sentiments with the shining drapery of talk, so that one who was not keenly on the watch, could not discern their real features.

A very faint shadow had arisen, betwixt Wealthy and Janet, during this time. They were not in reality less attached to each other, but the former knew that the governess still entertained some vague suspicions, with regard to the worthiness of the man whom she could no longer doubt was seeking to be her lover; and it was natural that this knowledge should annoy her, although the subject had never been alluded to by either of the friends, since the day in the woods.

Mr. Brainerd was fast gaining the affections of the young heiress, and there was no one to give her the faintest warning respecting the true character of the man who was seeking her hand.

Mrs. Humphreys liked him immensely. The mother evidently was pleased with the classmate of her son-in-law. Mr. Winchester, who was the young lady's guardian, would probably have bestowed the hand of his ward on Ralph Brainerd, without a suspicion that the man was not in very deed and truth worthy of her.

The old gentleman had, however, returned to the city, and left his wife to prolong her visit with her daughter.

And what evidence had Janet Strong to bring against this man, or what grounds that would not seem to others the weakest prejudices, for her suspicions regarding him?

There were times, however, when her affection for Wealthy Dana, and her fears for that young lady's future, crowded down so heavily on Janet's soul, that she was almost driven out of her habitual reticence. She sometimes fancied that Mr. Humphreys did not quite share his wife's admiration of their guest. She knew that it is easier for a man to disguise his true character to a woman, than it is to one of his own sex.

The classmates were thrown constantly together. Mr. Humphreys easily penetrated disguises. It was hardly possible that Ralph Brainerd should not make some slight revelations of himself to his host.

Janet was pondering this one evening, and leaning over the balcony railing at the side of the house, in that half-dejected state of mind which her troubled thoughts engendered, when Mr. Humphreys came out suddenly, and surprised her.

The rest of the family were out on various errands of business or pleasure. The gentleman had been detained at home by some letters which demanded his immediate response.

"Why, little lady," he said, this having become one of Janet's familiar household titles, "you look solitary, and sad withal! Will you take a walk with me down the road to meet my wife and cousin?"

She accepted his invitation, and his arm together, and they went down the grounds, and out on the road lying in the faint light of the new moon. A sudden impulse moved Janet, and impelled her thought into speech.

"Mr. Humphreys, you have observed the very manifest attentions which Mr. Brainerd is paying your cousin?"

"I have observed them."

"And you think she—accepts them?"

"I think she does."

"And you think, too, that Mr. Brainerd is worthy in every respect of your cousin?"

"Well—yes—I presume he is." But the words were not animated, and the tone seemed to show that they were uttered with some lurking doubt in the speaker's mind.

Janet stood still. "Mr. Humphreys," she said solemnly,

with the tears shining across her eyes, "you are Wealthy's friend. You stand in some sense in the place of the father and the brother who are dead. I beseech you, if you have any doubts, any fears of this man, whom we all see is gaining her affections, do not hesitate to inform her of them before it is too late!" Her solemnity impressed Guy Humphreys.

"The truth is, Miss Janet," he said, "if Wealthy were my own sister, and she could hardly be dearer in that case, I could not raise one well-founded objection to Brainerd's suit. I have not a single fact to adduce in his disfavor. He was wild, and had the name of being a spendthrift in college; but it's absurd to speak of that, if he's all right now."

Janet drew a long, long sigh, which was a faint articulation of much that burdened her heart.

"I see that Brainerd doesn't possess your entire confidence; and it is the more singular, because he is such a favorite with your sex. What a wonderful power of language the man has!"

"Yes, his talk and manner are all captivating; but a woman like Wealthy Dana needs something better than this, in the man to whom she commits the happiness of her life."

"And a woman, sensitive, and high-spirited like Wealthy Dana, will demand some more tangible evidence against a man in whom she is interested, than some vague surmise, which is all you and I can possibly offer. Prejudice or injustice on our part would only strengthen her regard for him. The inquiries which I have made have only resulted in Brainerd's favor."

At that moment the story of the encounter which she had had in the woods with the stranger, was on the lips of Janet Strong; but voices down the road restrained her, and the speakers soon emerged into view, and proved themselves Mrs. Humphreys and her cousin, escorted by Mr. Brainerd.

Of course the young wife must have her jest at discovering the company with which her husband was taking his moonlight stroll, which, however, the gentleman gravely retaliated upon her, insisting that since the advent of his guest and classmate, his wife had manifested a very marked negligence of all marital duties and interests.

"I do not plead guilty there," exclaimed the lively little lady, "but allowing, for the sake of argument, the truth of

your accusation, it is perfectly manifest, oh, Mr. Humphreys, that you are very easily solaced for the loss of my society."

Here Mr. Brainerd came to the lady's aid, and there was of course one of those light skirmishes of words in which the hostess was so accomplished; and Janet listened, as she oftenest did, with a little, half-amused smile, which sometimes broke out into a merry peal of laughter that they all liked to hear, at some irresistible sally; but in her secret soul she often wondered whether this pretty talk was not, after all, idle words, hardly befitting so much of the time and thought of men and women, whose life here held such vast responsibilities and close relations with another just beyond.

A little cry from Wealthy Dana changed the tenor of the conversation.

"I've lost my bracelet!" she exclaimed, in a voice full of dismay, "the one with the ancient rubies, which was my mother's, Evelyn. I thought the clasp had grown loose; I must have dropped it in our walk."

"Can you remember where you last observed it?" asked Mr. Brainerd.

"Yes; I secured the clasp, or thought I did, at the corner of the lane."

"I will return and search for it. In the mean time, Humphreys, you come along slowly with the ladies; I have no doubt but we shall find your bracelet, Miss Wealthy;" and he was gone in quest of it.

It was half a mile to the lane, and the road by which they had come, led through a belt of woods on one side, and wide low pastures on the other. Mr. Brainerd went rapidly ahead, scouring the ground for some time, apparently without success. But at last, as they were peering down in the tall, wet grass, his voice came to them with a loud halloo through the silence, for he was nearly a quarter of a mile distant. The next moment there was the quick, sharp report of a pistol up in the woods. The ladies shrieked.

"Hallo, there! you'll do mischief!" shouted Guy Humphreys into the dark of the woods. But he had no small difficulty in quieting the fears of the ladies, assuring them that somebody was in the woods in quest of game, or some green, farmer's boy, probably, trying his hand at a target.

"He'd better take daylight for such exploits," added Mrs. Humphreys, in which sentiment they all heartily concurred.

"But what has become of Mr. Brainerd? the report was much nearer him," said Miss Dana.

Mr. Humphreys sent his voice out into the night again : "Brainerd, are you shot?"

There was no answer in the pause that followed, save the chirping of the crickets. The young moon was going down; the thick streams of stars made only a faint light in the summer evening. The stillness and the darkness filled them with a nameless terror. Wealthy and Janet grasped each other, and Evelyn clung, shivering with fright, to her husband.

"There! Be a woman, dear!" he said. "Don't be frightened, girls. It's strange Brainerd doesn't answer," and his voice showed the apprehension he sought to conceal. In a moment he lifted his hands to his lips and shouted at the highest key of his voice—"Brainerd, where are you?"

"Here I am," was answered, hardly above a whisper, at a little distance, and the gentleman came up to them.

"Are you shot?" was Wealthy Dana's first question, her voice betraying more solicitude than she suspected.

"I believe not exactly, but I came very near it. Humphreys, it may not be altogether safe to remain here."

It was evident that Mr. Brainerd thought there was reason for alarm. His manner impressed his host so strongly, that he did not stop for any explanations, but he hurried along with the ladies, and asked no further questions until he was safe in his own grounds.

"Now what does all this mean, I should like to know?" was his first demand after they had shut the gate.

"That's precisely my state of mind," answered the guest. "All I can say is that your bracelet, Miss Dana, saved my life. I saw it gleaming in the grass, and shouted back to you that I had found it. Just after the shout, the gun was fired, but I had leaned down to pick up the bracelet, and the shot simply knocked my hat off."

"Oh, dear, dear!" broke out Mrs. Humphreys, shivering and fairly sobbing, "I'm so frightened, Guy!"

"Nonsense, child, there's nothing to fear! only I wish I had hold of the rascal who is trying his gun in our woods at this time of night, and doesn't know how to handle it so as to keep from shooting people. The truth is, Brainerd, there's a perfect mania for fire-arms taken possession of the men and boys around here this summer."

"I'd like to treat this especial youth to a night's lodging in the county jail."

They had come into the house, the women pale and excited, the men a good deal discomposed, although in a different way.

"But do you feel quite certain there was no harm intended, Humphreys? A robber or wretch of any kind might be skulking in the woods out there."

"My dear fellow, I'll wager my fortune that some verdant farm-boy about here made his maiden shot at that moment. I'd rally a company of my fellow-townspeople and have the woods scoured, only, of course, the fellow's smart enough to make his retreat before this time; and the people are clannish, too, and wouldn't betray a comrade."

It is never pleasant for a man to be shot at in the dark. Mr. Brainard was physically no coward, still he did not seem at first inclined to regard the perpetrator of the shot as so entirely free from all malice aforethought as did his host. The ladies gathered around, white and silent, listening to the gentlemen.

It was singular—Janet afterward thought it unaccountably so—that no suspicion of the youth she had encountered in the woods entered the mind of the governess at this time. Mr. Humphreys was slightly surprised that his guest was so slow to accept his version of the matter, and a little annoyed on account of the fears of the ladies that it should be so, and at last he said to him, in a bantering tone:

"Well, Ralph, as for robbers, at this time of the evening, and under these circumstances, waylaying a man, it's simply out of the question; but if you've got an enemy in the world who owes you a deadly grudge, and who is willing to take the risk of being hung for the sake of taking revenge on you, it's barely possible that he might take some such method of putting you out of the way, although a moonlight evening and a company of friends would not be very attractive adjuncts to such a deed."

It seemed as if the lurking fiend in the man leaped out a moment in the expression that flashed on his face. But it went swift and silent as it came, and no one saw it.

"I am not aware," he said in his deep tones, touched with a certain lightness, "that I have an enemy in the world who would carry matters so far as this, or who has reasons for getting me out of the way sufficient to induce him to run his

neck into a hangman's noose. I shall accept your version of the matter, Guy."

And after expressing ample regrets that his guest should have come so near "furnishing a target for some plowboy's gun," Mr. Humphreys entreated him to bring back the lost roses to the ladies' cheeks. "What a little flock of pale-faced cowards you all were; but, Evelyn, you behaved the worst of the three."

"And Janet the best," said Wealthy Dana, wanting to say something, and regretting the next moment she had hit on that especial remark, for there was a meaning in Guy's glance she could not misinterpret.

"There was a double reason why you and my wife should be distressed!" he said, but in so low a tone that no one saving the lady for whom it was intended caught the words.

The gentlemen managed to have a lively evening to banish all memory of the late fright, and filled it up until late hours, with music and merriment, and loitering over their cream.

Before Janet retired, she slipped off a moment into the conservatory, loving the bloom and fragrance there—the silence too. And here in a few moments came Ralph Brainerd and Wealthy Dana. They did not see the figure sheltered by the great orange-tree, and before Janet had time to discover herself, the gentleman spoke:

"Miss Dana, before we part for the night I have a request, not a slight one, to ask of you."

"What is it?" said the soft voice of the lady whom Janet loved.

"I want your permission to hold that bracelet of yours in my possession for a day, perhaps a couple of them, because it is yours and because it saved my life."

The lady looked up now with something in her face which must have flattered him.

"Oh, Mr. Brainerd," she said, "how very near it came to costing you your life!"

"It would have been lost in very sweet service, then," he answered.

This time she did not answer.

"May I take it?" he asked, laying his fingers on the white wrist, where the ancient rubies blazed.

She laid the jewels in his hand. He held hers a moment,

bending down and touching the fingers which bestowed the gift with light, and reverent lips.

Many a man would have thought his ground secure, and pushed the advantage which he had gained. But Ralph Brainerd felt he could afford to wait. The young girl by his side was not easily won, and he was certain each day now only served to make his path a little smoother. So they went out of the conservatory together. And a little while later went out softly Janet Strong, with the great tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Wealthy, Wealthy, I would save you if I could!" she murmured, when she reached her own room, and the tears dripped on the solitary emerald which gleamed on her finger; but from what she would save Wealthy Dana, Janet did not know, until afterward!

## CHAPTER XVII.

BEFORE the next week was gone, Mrs. Winchester was suddenly summoned to New York by her husband, and on the same day Wealthy received letters from some old friends in Europe, who were about to sail for home, and whom she had engaged to meet on their arrival. So she at last decided to accompany her aunt, and Mr. Brainerd volunteered to take charge of the ladies as far as the city, which he would be obliged to leave almost immediately, as some business transactions summoned him West.

Sad with the thought of her friend's departure, and with some thoughts that went into deeper gulfs than this, Janet leaned out of the window one afternoon—the last of Wealthy's visit. The ladies were packing their trunks. Maude was gone to ride with her uncle, and there was, what Janet did not often find, and prized accordingly, a prospect of a couple of hours with her books.

But these lay closed on the table at this time, failing to persuade her. She leaned out of the window. It was now among the early days of September, and as her eyes roamed across the landscape they were suddenly concentrated by a young maple, in whose dark green foliage, a solitary bough ran up its scarlet torch of leaves.

There had been no frosts as yet. The bough flamed up amid the dead green, a fiery witness of the change and glory to come. So Janet read it, and having a fancy for all vivid tints, she resolved to possess this one, deciding with a hasty glance that the bough was low enough to be within her reach.

But, as was natural, she was mistaken here, as she found when she reached the maple-tree, which stood in a part of the grounds most remote from the house, near a small, dark grove of cedars and spruces.

Janet recollects a rustic bench which usually stood here, and which would bring the leaves she coveted within her

reach, and she went hastily into the grove, which was seldom visited by the family except in the heats of the summer, when its coolness and shade were grateful. And here under the thick shadow of the trees, on the dry leaves which blanketed the ground, Janet came suddenly upon a figure which it took no second glance to recognize, for it was that of the man she had encountered in the woods. There he lay—his straw hat on the ground, the faint sunlight on the brown face, the homely features somewhat softened in slumber, a little smile about the large, honest mouth—there he lay, and his gun lay beside him.

Amazement held back motion and speech for a moment! What was this stranger doing in Mr. Humphreys' grounds, and above all, what did that gun mean beside him? Then in a flash there came back to Janet's memory the shot in the woods, a few nights previous.

Could this man be seeking the life of Ralph Brainerd? A terror seized her that sent a sudden faintness through every limb; a swift instinct took possession of her to fly and inform the household of the danger which lurked in its vicinity, but the sick faintness chained her for a moment to the spot, and in that moment the youth opened his eyes, and saw Janet standing there with her white, frightened face.

"Maggie—Maggie! Is it you?" he said, in a voice hardly raised above a whisper, and yet full of such tenderness, that the tears thrilled the eyes of Janet Strong, and almost against her will she was constrained to answer:

"You are mistaken. I am not Maggie."

The man rose up now, looking at her with bewilderment and fear in his face; he drew his hands before his eyes much as he had done in the woods, and in that movement the truth seemed to come out with sharp distinctness to his consciousness. He rose to his feet, the large burly figure towering considerably above her head.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," he said, in a pleasant, sincere kind of voice, which it seemed could never belong to a bad man. "You are the lady whom I met the other day in the woods?"

Janet's terror had quite disappeared now. "I must be mistaken," she thought. "This man does not mean harm to any one." And with that conviction she answered:

"Yes, I am she. I suppose that you are in quest of game about here."

The broad figure was visibly shaken. The man glanced at his gun, with a sharp fierceness in his eyes and a smile—an indescribable one, bitter and stern as that which a wronged and innocent man might carry to his death, touched the mouth that looked so honest and frank a moment before in its sleep.

"Not the kind you think of, I 'spose, though I'm trespassin' on other folks' premises."

"I was not thinking of that, only—only there was a gun fired accidentally in the woods the other night, and it came near killing a friend of ours, and if you should be found lying about here with your fire-arms, it might expose you to suspicion."

As Janet ceased speaking, a carriage drove into the grounds, and the wind bore down to the grove the voices of Mr. Humphreys and his guest, in loud talk and laughter.

The young man heard it. The change which came over his face was terrible. His eyes darkened, and flashed with a hungry fierceness, every feature sharpened, the kindly mouth settled into a white rigidness; he glanced at his gun and then at Janet, and in that moment she knew that she only stood betwixt Ralph Brainerd and his death!

I think she would have turned and fled, but a sick faintness came over her, in which, after all, was no fear for herself, and involuntarily a low moan broke from her lips. The rough brown hand was laid lightly on the shivering girl's arm; and a voice said, so kindly, that hearing, one could never have doubted for a moment:

"Don't be afraid, lady. I would not hurt a hair of your head for all the world."

Janet's hands dropped, and she met the youth's eyes with her own, shocked and sorrowful.

"Yes, but you are seeking that man's life!"

He held his gaze frankly on her face, even when she put this terrible accusation to his. He did not wince, neither was there the slightest shade of shame or fear in the young face.

"What makes you think so?" he asked, with a manner so calm that it well-nigh amounted to indifference.

"Because I read it in your face," answered Janet Strong.

"Then there won't be any use in denying it, even if I wanted to. I have a right to this man's life!"

No wonder that Janet shivered again at the fearful words,

and at the slow, solemn tone which showed they uttered an iron conviction of the speaker, but she did not think of flying from him now.

"Do not say that—you know it is not true. Oh, I beseech you, whatever wrongs you may have suffered, and which seem to justify you in seeking this man's life, do not stain your youth with such a crime—do not take on your soul this sin, which will blast all your future!"

She could see now that her appeal reached him by a slight quivering of the muscles about his mouth, and her desire to save this youth from the great peril which was assailing him hurried her words.

"I know from your face that you are not used to deeds like this, and because I dare to stay here and plead with you, in the name of God above, in the name of your mother, be she living or dead, in the name of all you hold dear in this world, or in another, do not commit this sin, which the devil is tempting you to do."

Strong, salt words these were of Janet's; just such words as would be most likely to avail with a nature like the one whom she addressed; and even Ralph Brainerd, with all his power to reach, and sway others, could not have pleaded more eloquently for his life than did this small, frail girl, although it was singular enough that at that moment her fears were deeper for the murderer, than his intended victim.

The man was visibly moved. She could see the tears fairly strain themselves into his eyes. She could not tell whether his purpose wavered as he looked at her, and shook his head, saying:

"If you knew, lady, what a black heart this man carried, and what misery he had wrought in the world, you would not stand here pleading as you do for his life."

"Yes, I should, all the same, no matter what foul work he has wrought for you or yours. It is God's law that I should still plead in his behalf. 'Thou shalt not kill.'"

Again he looked at her—the rustic plowboy, whose name she did not even know, and yet to whose inmost soul she had penetrated.

"Lady," he said, "you have called this Ralph Brainerd your friend!" his very voice seemed to loathe the name. "You do not love him?"

"No, thank God, a thousand times, no!" she answered, fervently.

"You may well say 'thank God,' if you knew what I might tell you."

Then, as though some other thought had seized him, and before she could answer, he turned suddenly on his heel and walked back and forth, pushing his large fingers through his thick hair, while some doubt or struggle which Janet could not reach, went on in his soul.

At last he came and stood still before the girl; and looking at her, he said :

"If you will listen to my story, ma'am, I'll tell you the whole, though I've carried it in my heart three years, and no mortal ever learned it, and I never meant any should—not so long as he walked the earth; and when you come to know all, you'll think I had a right to put him out of it."

Janet's face spoke up here, an absolute, eternal denial, but the youth did not answer it, and so he commenced with his story, not even pausing to exact a promise from the girl that she would not betray his secret. So they stood there together, in the little grove under the dark foliage of spruce and cedar, with the shadows of the failing autumn afternoon making a gloom about them, through which the sunbeams wove faint threads of light—so they stood there, the pale, sweet-faced girl, the tanned and brawny plowboy, and Janet listened to the story, which she will never forget to the latest hour of her life.

"My name is Mark Ritter, ma'am. I was born in—no matter for the name—a pretty little village that lies hid among the mountains of upper Vermont. My father was a farmer, never very forehanded, but still he had a small farm, with a nice little cottage homestead on it, and so long as he lived we managed to get a comfortable livin', for he worked early and late on the few acres that his father left him.

"We hadn't much to boast on, but an honest name that nobody could gainsay, and I don't believe there's been many a happier childhood in high lots or low uns, than mine—mine and my sister's—little Maggie Ritter's. She was four years older than I, and there was somethin' in the turn of her head and the carriage of her figure that's wonderfully like yours, and that overcome me in the woods the other day, jest as it did when I woke up and found you standing here, and thought for the minit she'd come back again. She was a pretty creature—that little, only sister o' mine, with roses as red as the wild ones we find in the Vermont woods,

and thick, bright curls o' hair, and a face that was always like her voice, full of sweetness, and a laugh jest ready to break out—you wouldn't think such a dainty lady-like little thing, that seemed too good for our home, although she was its light, and pride, and joy, could be the sister to such a clumsy-framed, awkward fellow as I am; but I took after my father, and he used to say Maggie had absorbed all the grace and beauty of the family and left none for me; but I was content that she should have it all.

"Of course we doated on her more than anything in the world, and she took to her books as ducks to water, and father would sooner have worked his fingers to the bone than denied her anything, so he sent her to the academy in the next town, for half a dozen years, and she outstripped most of the scholars there, and brought home the prizes every term, and they made a pretty show on the front mantle, and I don't believe that ever a day passed that mother didn't go in there and look at 'em with such a proud, pleased kind of look, and her mouth in a sort of tremble, jest about half as though she was goin' to laugh, and half as though she was goin' to cry.

"Well, to make the story short as I can, Maggie had jest got beyond her eighteenth birthday, and I was past my fifteenth, when the old father broke down all of a sudden. He'd been ailin' for several years, but he wasn't much of a hand to complain, and as he kept on at the farm work, we hadn't felt any serious alarm; but he went all of a sudden at the last; and when he found it was all over with him, he called us to his bedside, and put his hands on his children's heads and blessed 'em, and said to me, 'Mark, you're young in years yet, but you've got a good stout heart in you, and I leave the poor old mother and little Maggie in your care. They're frail, tender women, and the thought o' them has nerved my arm many a day as it must yours, that's younger and stouter now.'

"And I promised my old father, and them words were the last he ever heard in this world."

The speaker's voice failed him for a moment, as that death far away in the little village hidden among the mountains come back to him. And for Janet, the tears were trickling down her cheeks as she listened, and she did not know it; but Mark Ritter did. I think just then his heart had so far failed him, that he might not have kept on the path of his

tale, if it had not been for the sight of that girl's tears.  
After awhile he continued :

"After the old father died we had a hard pull of it, but we managed to keep the old place, and I took charge on't, while Maggie got the post of village school teacher, and the next two years was a happy time, despite all the loss and the hard work; and then—and then all of a sudden *he* came into our midst with his tongue like an angel's, and his heart blacker than a fiend's!" and Mark Ritter ground his teeth, and the words seemed to force themselves through.

"You mean this man, Ralph Brainerd?" interposed Janet, intent now on learning the whole truth.

"I mean *him!*" and I think there was a curse followed the pronoun in Mark Ritter's thoughts, although his eyes only spoke it.

"There lay a few miles to the east of our village some fine streams for troutting, and they were a good deal sought after in the summer by the gentlemen from the city, who used to take board in the taverns round, and it was nothing unusual to find 'em on horseback in the country roads, or angling in the ponds.

"One day—it was somewhere in the second July after our father died, Maggie got home late from school, looking prettier it seemed to me than she ever had in her whole life. Her little straw hat that she carried up to the red district school-house every day, was lying on one side of her shining curls, and her blue eyes looked like a couple o' mountain violets that have just shaken the morning dew off from 'em, as she came into the room where I sat, chatting with mother, for it was in the midst of the harvest, and I'd been hard at work all day.

"'Wall, Maggie,' said I, 'somethin's happened to you!'

"'How do you know that, Mark?' with her laugh that had the sound in it of a brook singin' for very joy on its road to the river.

"'Cos' I can see it in your eyes—there's a great surprise in 'em.'

"'Well, you're right, something *has* happened,' she said, and slipping off her bonnet she sat down at mother's feet, twirling the ribbons in her hand; and I can see her sitting right there now, with the dimples alive in her cheeks, and the sunshine coming in through the vine about the low south window, and we listening to her story. Oh, Maggie, Mag-

gie, the light of that summer day was the blackest that had ever risen on you, and you never dreaming it, sitting there in your girlish joy, and innocence, and beauty, and we so proud on it—”

Here Mark Ritter broke down again. There was no one but Janet to hear or see him, and she always broke down too, at this very point, when she afterward repeated the story. And Mark Ritter took up the thread afterward.

“It seemed that when school was over, Maggie took the long road home which led round by the woods, and past the creek. There was a river about a mile from our house, over which a little foot-bridge ran, but Maggie found when she got to the bank that a part of the old bridge had been carried off by the spring flood.

“‘I must go three miles round! There’s no help for it,’ she said to herself, standing on the bank of the river, and looking at the broken bridge.

“And then a young man suddenly sprang to his feet from under a tree, a little way off, and came toward her with his hat in one hand and his fishing-pole in the other.

“‘Pardon me, Miss,’ he said, ‘but there *is* help at hand if you will accept it; my little boat lies just down behind the bend there, and I shall be most happy to row you across it, if you will allow me that pleasure.’

Maggie saw at once that he was one of the gentlemen from the city, who were in those parts that summer, and after hesitating a moment about the propriety of it, accepted the stranger’s offer, as the afternoon was so late, and the road was so long.

“‘Did I do right, mother?’ she asked, with the pink ribbons in her fingers put to shame by the pink roses in her cheeks.

“‘I think you did—it was certainly very polite in the young man,’ said mother.

“And Maggie told us how very kind and respectful he was; how, after he had rowed her across the river, he walked up the turnpike to our gate, talking in a grave, pleasant way, that was unlike any other man whom she had ever met, and put her quite at her ease at once.

“He had given her his card when he left her at the gate, and had asked permission to call on her mother, saying that he should probably remain for some weeks at the tavern, *among the mountains*, as he had come up there to recruit his health.

"‘And I told him,’ said Maggie, ‘that I presumed you and Mark would be happy to see him, and thank him for the courtesy which he had shown me.’

“I spoke up here: ‘I don’t want these city fops lounging around here for a sight o’ my sister’s pretty face. Fine dress, and fine manners, and fine talk don’t make al’ays a true, honest heart, Maggie, and I ain’t much confidence in these city chaps. They carry too much outside.’

“I know that this man was what he seemed,’ Maggie answered with a great deal of decision, considering her acquaintance with him was not an hour long, and she called me afterward ‘old Growler’ in her playful way, and said everybody couldn’t be homely and honest as I was; and I could see that mother on the whole took sides with her daughter, and I was younger than both of them, and had to yield.

“The next day there came a present of some very fine trout to mother, with another card attached to ‘em bearing Ralph Brainerd’s name; and the next day he came himself—afterward there was not a day for two months following, in which that man’s black shadow did not cross our threshold. I need not tell you, young lady, that we all liked him. I had determined I wouldn’t, and tried to hold out against him, but before our second meeting was over he’d won me to put such faith in him as my mother and sister did.

“I can’t dwell on the next two months—it maddens me al’ays to think it over. The man played his game deep and well. He’d come over and sit for hours together when Maggie was at school, talking with mother in such a kind, considerate way about her health, and listening to her long stories of her youth and her dead husband; and then, with the tongue of an angel, he had always a way of slipping in some little praise of Maggie, in just the right time and way, and he completely won mother’s heart, and she thought him the pleasantest, noblest gentleman she had ever seen.

“Then there was Maggie—poor, little, happy, innocent lamb—we all saw how it was going with her. She grew handsomer every day with her blushes and her smiles; and this man had a way of offering her a book, or handing her to a chair, as though she were a crowned princess, and that the fitting throne for her; and when he paid her any little compliment, the manner made the words a thousand times more and sweeter; and the contrast betwixt him and the

young men round there, that were al'ays striving to get a word or a smile—young lady, you know this man—all his artful ways and words that might deceive an angel; do you wonder my little sister loved him?"

"No," faltered Janet, under her breath, thinking of Robert Crandall. "I do not wonder!"

"We none of us were surprised at it. We wasn't surprised either that he wanted to take Maggie to wife, for we thought she was worthy of the best and noblest man on the earth; and whenever mother would regret that her daughter hadn't seen more of the world, and had better advantages all her life than our little village could give her, he had al'ays his answer ready:

"Don't say that, Mrs. Ritter, *I* cannot hear you thus deprecate your daughter. Society has nothing to give her. You might as soon say that this wild rose which I hold, plucking one from the briar bush against the window, 'could be improved by a painter's brush. Margaret Ritter is so complete in herself that the world has nothing to add to her.'"

And unconsciously the youth's voice took the very inflections of Ralph Brainerd's, until it almost seemed to Janet that he was speaking in her ear.

"And mother would answer, her poor pale face kindled all up into a glow, and the tears in her eyes at such praise:

"Ah, Mr. Brainerd, you flatter my child!"

"When I speak the simple truth of her, my dear madam? My poor judgment ought at least to have some weight in this matter, for I have seen and known women whose beauty and cultivation adorned not only the first circles of our own country, but those of foreign lands, and you will permit me to say here, that among them all I never met one who, in grace and beauty, in qualities of mind and heart, could rival your daughter. I should be proud to set her in their midst to-morrow, as I hope to some day."

"And the words sounded very sweet in the poor old doating mother's ears, and she thought to herself—"Maggie has found a man who appreciates and deserves her."

"We were all fools then; but how could we know that we hadn't a man but a fiend to deal with?"

"How could you know!" murmured Janet, shuddering, and thinking of Wealthy Dana.

"Somewhere late in September, about two months after

we had first seen Brainerd, he began to talk about business calling him away, and I used to notice that my sister looked a little doubtful and anxious about this time. I fancied she had something on her mind, and it sort o' troubled me, though I concluded it was the thought of her lover's going, that naturally made her a little sober.

"But, one day, that was soft and warm, as though it was twin sister to this, I came home tired out from a hard day's work, for I'd been building a stone fence round the south medder, and after tea was over, I went and sat out on the cool back porch, and watched the stars come twinkling through the great hop vine, as I used to when I was a child. And here Maggie came in a little while, and put her arm around my neck. I looked up in her face, and there was something in it that I couldn't quite understand, but it touched me. 'Little sister,' I said, 'what's the matter with you?'

"Nothing, oh, nothing, Mark,' and she tried to make her tone light; I could see she did.

"I thought that Brainerd's going away was at the bottom of it all, so I said, 'He's only going to leave you for a little while, and he'll come back to have you al'ays to himself. Is it very hard to stay with me and mother till then?'

"The tears came in her eyes. I could see the blue shining through them, as a bit of our mountain sky sometimes shines through an evening mist.

"Oh, don't talk so,' she said, quickly, and then she suddenly drew her arm around my neck. 'Mark,' she said, 'you're a darling old brother; the best brother that ever a sister had.'

"No, Maggie, that isn't true,' I answered, drawing her to me. 'I sometimes think you've a good deal of reason to be ashamed of me, for I wasn't cut out for a gentleman as you was for a lady, and at the best, I'm a clumsy, awkward bumpkin.'

"You were cut out for a good, honest, true man, Mark Ritter!' she answered, 'and you will make one that I shall be proud of all the days of my life.'

"What, when *he* makes a grand lady of you, and takes you away from the old cottage, and makes you the mistress of his splendid home—won't you be a sort of ashamed of your farmer brother when he comes to see you, with his sunburnt face and his hard hands?"

"'Mark, Mark,'—I can see her standing—I can hear her speaking now—I thought you knew me better than that' and something in her voice made me sorry that I'd said what I had, and I told her so.

"'Mark,' she said, a minute afterward, 'do you love me?'

"'Why, of course I do, Maggie, better than anything in the world. What makes you ask?'

"'And you have faith in me too, Mark, that could not be easily shaken, that would trust me, in case I should do anything which, for awhile, must seem rash or wrong, and you would believe I had acted wisely, and for the best, and could in time make it all right?'

"She spoke with a strange solemnity now, and we stood there together with the stars looking down upon us.

"'Maggie,' I answered, 'I know you could never be made to do anything which you believed was wrong. I should hold fast my faith in you through any trial. But I hope none is coming; what makes you talk so?'

"'You will understand some time perhaps, and remember what I said; and—and, Mark, I know you will always take care of and comfort our poor mother.'

"'Have you any reason to doubt it, Maggie?' feeling a little hurt.

"'Oh no, no. You will understand it all some day, Mark; and so I did, better than she at that time, ay, a thousand times better.

"I remember she put her arms around my neck and hugged me in a way that was not just like her, and called me a dear old fellow, over and over, and I can see her looking back over her shoulder, and smiling at me as she went, and I thought how pretty she was, and how dearly I loved her; but that night was the very last time that I ever saw the sparklin' face of my sister; and it would have been better for her, better for her a thousand times, if I had dashed her down dead at my feet, as she stood there in her smiles and her beauty, than to have let her gone away from me as she did that night."

A low groan dropped out of Janet's lips; she forestalled what was coming. Mark kept on:

"I was only seventeen then, and though I have cursed myself for my stupidity in not seeing through Maggie's speech, that some wrong was brewing, it never struck me at the time. Maybe one reason was, that I was tired with my

long day's work, and went to bed in a little while, and fell into a sound sleep, and never dreamed of all the wrong and shame that night was to bring on us!"

Mark Ritter paused here a moment, and looked in Janet's face, as though his courage had half failed him; but her eyes, with their grief and pity, persuaded him to keep on to the sad end of his story, as no words could. He took it up once more.

"The next morning when I woke, the birds were singing in the old cherry-tree by the window, and I lay awhile listening to them, and thinking over all that Maggie had said to me the night before. When at last I was dressed, and just about to leave the room, I caught sight of a little paper folded on the table, as though to attract my notice, and I opened it, and knew Maggie's hand before I read it:

"'MARK, DEAR BROTHER:—I shall put your promise to an early trial, for I must go away from you for a little while. It grieves me greatly to do it—to cost you and mother this pang; but it is my duty, and I have at last made up my mind to the step.

"'I charge you give yourself no fears for me. You know that all the world would not tempt me to do for one moment what was wrong; but this step now is wisest, and best, as you will say when I come back, and explain it all. Don't let our mother grieve for me; that is the hardest thought in this going away, but I shall surely come back in a little while to make you both, dearest of mothers, and best of brothers, happy all the days of my life.'"

"She had not gone off with that man; tell me she had not gone!" fairly shrieked Janet, as she grasped Mark Ritter's arm, while the awful jeopardy of one night of her life seemed to come back and overshadow her.

"God forgive her," sobbed Mark Ritter; "she had gone with him!"

And here he and Janet Strong wept together. After awhile he took up his story again.

"I think the letter fairly stunned me at first. I saw clear enough then, the meaning of all Maggie had said to me the night before; but still I couldn't make up my mind that she was really gone, until I went to her room and saw that the bed hadn't been slept in that night, and part of her dresses

had disappeared from the closets. Then I heard mother at the foot of the stairs calling Maggie and me, and I remembered that it was left to me to break the truth to her, and that was hardest of all.

"I was a simple-hearted boy then, you see, Miss, and I could not have conceived of such a villain as this Ralph Brainerd, much less that *he* was one, and so I made up my mind at once, that, for some good reason, he had persuaded Maggie to run off and marry him. I would as soon doubted my own soul as his honor, and I knew that Maggie had written the simple truth when she said that not all the world, nor her own life, could persuade her to do what was wrong; so I had not lost faith in anybody when I went down stairs that morning, only I was troubled that my sister had had to run away to get married—that was all.

"I found mother setting the table, which was Maggie's work. She looked up with a little smile, and said:

"'Oh, I've got a dreadful lazy boy and girl. It's after six o'clock.'

"Then I had to tell her. It was harder work than I expected, and a long time before I could make her comprehend it. I could see it was a blow that hurt her to the quick. She couldn't understand it, although I insisted that it was all right, that Mr. Brainerd and Maggie would not have done this thing if they had not sufficient reasons for it, and did all that I could to comfort her. But the thought that her daughter had run away from her home cut sorely. 'She might have told her mother! she might have told her mother!' she kept saying, with the tears running slow down her face.

"'No, she couldn't,' I answered, stoutly, determined to think so, and remembering my promise to my sister. 'You know your daughter would not have deceived you, if she could have helped it.'

"So I reasoned with and comforted her, and read Maggie's letter over, until we both knew it by heart. Of course she had the same confidence in Brainerd that I had. It would have killed her outright if she had suspected any wrong was coming to her daughter; but at last when I'd talked away down into the morning, she brightened up a little, and said:

"'She'll come back in a little while, she says. Don't you 'spose that means by to-night?'

"My heart sunk, for I had placed Maggie's return a good deal farther off than that. 'Oh no, not to-night. You must make up your mind to her being gone longer.'

"How much longer?" as though *I* knew!

"Well, say a week."

"I can't," the poor old woman broke out here, "I can't live a whole week longer without seeing my Maggie!"

"But she did live,"—and here Mark Ritter broke down utterly. "I cannot go on," he said, wringing his hands together, and looking pitifully in Janet's face. "She did live—my poor old mother!"

"How long?" asked the white lips of Janet Strong.

"A year, and more!"

The rest was told so incoherently, with such terrible ebullitions of anguish, as harrowing memories swept over his tortured soul, that I cannot relate it in Mark Ritter's words, and must do it briefly in my own.

As the days of watching and suspense went on, the silence and the shadows fell heavier over the low homestead in Vermont. The poor old mother was certain every morning would bring her daughter, and never ceased listening for her by day or night. The hours dragged heavily—the mother's health sank with each one. Mark hardly dared leave her to attend to the farm work, for she clung to him every moment, and made him asseverate the same things a dozen times a day, and met him every morning with the eager question—"Don't you think Maggie'll be home before night, Mark?" and he always answered—"Oh, yes, I fully expect her." But she did not come—not even when a month, which seemed longer than all the rest of Mark's life, went by.

The district school was just closed, and it was easy to account for her absence to the neighbors, by saying she had gone away for a little while—they were not just then at liberty to tell where, but she was expected back soon; and though there was a great deal of curiosity on the subject, nobody had the right to press it on the girl's mother, and brother, and no suspicion of the true state of things entered the thoughts of any one in that retired neighborhood.

One night—it must have been about six weeks after Maggie had disappeared, Mark woke up and found his mother standing by his bedside. "I want to see Maggie—I want to see Maggie, Mark!" she said, in a piteous tone, and her eyes shone bright and scared through the darkness.

And Mark took the poor old mother in his arms, and comforted her as best he could; but while he was talking, she put her lips down to his ear, and said:

"Mark, you believe in your soul that Ralph Brainerd was a good man, don't you—a man with whom my precious child could be trusted to the ends of the earth?"

"Mother," Mark answered, "did you believe father was a good man—a man to be trusted anywhere, under any circumstances?"

He could not have asserted his faith in Ralph Brainerd in a way that would have more weight with his mother.

"I'm a poor, old, broken-down woman," she said, "and sometimes all kinds of fears take possession of me, and all the dreadful stories I've heard of bad men—who came almost in the guise of angels, and won the hearts of women to their ruin, all come back to me. Mark, Mark, it isn't proper to say these things to you, but I'm a foolish old woman, haunted by all sorts of fears, and if any harm should come to my little Maggie"—it was no wonder the poor woman's sobs choked her here.

And with a courage and thoughtfulness beyond his years did Mark Ritter comfort his mother. He reminded her of the days when Ralph Brainerd asked her to give him her child; and with what beautiful words he had promised to love and shelter the widowed mother's idol in his love and care, and how every day he used to read her favorite Psalms to Mrs. Ritter, and as Mark talked of all this, the mother's vague fears vanished away.

"He *must* have been a good man. I will not fear for my child," she said.

But perhaps those words of his mother had sown the first doubt of Ralph Brainerd in the soul of Mark Ritter. If it was so he would not acknowledge it; but as the days went and came, without his sister, and his mother's step grew feebler, until she could only walk betwixt her bed, and her chair, a foreboding of terrible evil came and wrapped his soul in its nightmare of fear and anguish.

Mark Ritter fought fiercely with his doubts. He would never acknowledge them for a moment to himself, much less to his mother; but the autumn burned itself out, and paled into winter, and the winter brightened and warmed itself into spring, and where was Maggie!

The old mother seldom left her bed now-a-days. Mark

nursed her tenderly through all that dreary time. She still kept up her old habit of listening for the light step that never came, and there was a piteous appeal in her face, and her mind frequently wandered when she talked about her lost child.

The neighbors too fancied something was wrong, because of Maggie's protracted absence; but the manner of Mrs. Ritter and her son precluded many questions on the subject, and the others were left to their own surmises.

Mark could not tell how, but through all this time, stoutly as he had wrestled with it, the fear that Ralph Brainerd had dealt foully with his sister had gained foothold in his soul. His mother's intuitions, keen enough in all that concerned her child, perhaps warned her of this; for she never alluded to the possibility now. It was evident that the loss of her daughter was killing her by inches, but Mark was sometimes glad that the blow had to a degree prostrated his mother, mind and body. Every time that he entered the room, she would turn eagerly to him, saying, pitifully :

" You think Maggie will come back soon, don't you, Mark ? "

And with a sinking heart Mark would answer cheerily :

" Oh, yes, I think Maggie will be back soon."

And the poor old mother would smile like a comforted child. And these two—the old woman, and the boy of whom this anxiety was making a man—tried to pass their evenings in wild conjecture of the causes of Maggie's flight; in devising circumstances which justified Ralph Brainerd in inducing her to elope, and consent to a surreptitious marriage; if it had not been so unutterably sad, it would have been vastly amusing to listen to their fancies, wilder and more impossible than the flights of any novelist—these two, who knew so little of the world outside their own narrow horizon.

At last Mark's solicitude for his sister became so insupportable, that he would certainly have started off in search of her to the ends of the earth, if it had not been for the mother, who hung her feeble thread of life on him. He knew it would snap if he left her. So the beauty of spring deepened into the glory of summer, and brought no light nor cheer to the old homestead, where the mother lay through the dreary hours listening still for her child, while in the

hearts of both mother and son lay, like a yawning black gulf, the dread of a possibility to which a thousand deaths would have been joy.

Mark had done his work faithfully that summer, plowing, and sowing, and reaping, as though nothing had happened; but when late in the autumn the farm-work was all finished, he made up his mind to take a journey to New York, and see if he could obtain any tidings of Ralph Brainerd.

He remembered now that he had no clew to the man's residence—that his conversation had never afforded them any. He had incidentally mentioned being frequently in New York, but he had distinctly informed them that he had no near relatives, and no abiding home in the world, having lost the former by death, the latter through the fraud of those whom he had trusted. Mark thought he might venture on a week's absence, leaving his mother in the care of a judicious nurse and neighbor, and he made up his mind to broach the subject to her one night, in the twilight, when he was out chopping the wood for next day's use; and there was a sharp, frosty chill in the air, which hinted that winter was drawing nigh. It would not be hard to gain his mother's consent to the journey, when she knew it was made in search of Maggie, and he could not rest any longer without some effort to find her. The time had long past for him to fortify himself against his fears, by falling back on the words she had spoken and written.

There was no doubt but Maggie had gone away in good faith, believing that she was doing right, but what if she had been deceived! Mark stopped here. He stopped his work also, for the pile of wood had grown fast, and so had the dark too. He laid down his axe. What was that dark figure which he caught sight of, leaning motionless over the low front palings? Surely there was something familiar in it! Why did his breath come so fast? His heart thumped at his throat. He sprang forward. The figure made an effort to move off, but seemed too weak to master more than a few rods. Mark was at its side in a moment—

"Maggie, oh, Maggie!"

She waved him off with her hands. But he put his arms around her and held her fast, as though he feared she would slip away from him.

"Come home, Maggie—come home." There was no doubting *that* welcome.

Then she looked up in his face.

"May I come home to die?—oh, Mark, I was afraid to!" said a voice that was changed, and yet the same—the voice of Margaret Ritter.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

MARK RITTER lifted his sister in his arms and carried her into the house—into the bed-room where her mother lay. He only witnessed the meeting betwixt these two, and he carries its memory so deep in his own soul that none will ever see it.

Deserted, dishonored, dying, Margaret Ritter had come back. It was a great mercy that the mother's mind, shattered by long anxiety and hope deferred, never fully realized this. Her daughter was back again; and that present joy seemed in a degree to absorb everything else in the old woman's thoughts. She could not bear Maggie out of her sight for an instant. She wanted her close by the bedside, where she would stroke the pale, thin face for hours with her trembling hands, as though it was a baby's, with her eyes full of doating fondness, murmuring, over and over to herself, "My little girl has come back to her mother. She'll never go away again. They haven't been good to her,—poor little Maggie!—but she's all safe with mother and Mark now!"

And although Mrs. Ritter thus evinced a vague consciousness that her daughter had suffered some great wrong, she never inquired into the particulars.

We have seen how Margaret Ritter went out from her home in the sweet bloom of her youth, with its light in her eyes and its joy in her heart. She came back a year later a pallid, broken, crushed woman, sinking into her grave. Her brother, who in thought and feeling had reached the full stature of a man, shut his eyes to the last fact, although the hectic in the cheek where the roses had once been, and the sharp, dry cough, bore constant witness of it.

It was several days before Mark learned the awful story, which nearly drove him mad. He knew that his sister was unfitted for any excitement, and he shrank himself from *knowing the worst*. But the tender reception, the soothing

care, the old home, did her good. A little wan smile would sometimes come to the sharpened lips ; and it was perhaps well for her, too, that her mother's feebleness rendered quiet, and self-control indispensable on Margaret's part.

One night, after the mother had fallen asleep, Maggie came softly and sat down in the great kitchen by the fireplace, where Mark was watching the hickory and chestnut logs unroll their red pennons of flame. The brother and sister looked at each other ; the tears were in the eyes of both. Mark fancied that she had something to say to him, something that he had not felt himself equal to hearing before that night. Now he leaned over and patted her shoulder.

"It seems good to see you back in the old place once more," he said.

"Does it, Mark ? If I had known that, I should not have stayed away so long."

"Maggie, could you doubt my heart and mother's ?"

"I was afraid, Mark, when I thought *how* I must come."

For a few moments neither spoke, only the strong arm of the young farmer held his sister a little tighter than before. She knew what the grasp meant, and it comforted her. At last he spoke, so low that his voice was almost a whisper.

• "Maggie, *he* was a demon, wasn't he ?"

She shuddered from head to foot.

"He was that, or worse, Mark."

"When did you find it out ?"

"Last April."

"So long ago, and you stayed away all this time—oh, Maggie !" There was grief and reproach in his voice.

"Mark, you know what I was when I went away. How could I come back what I am ?" said the poor girl, burying her face in her hands.

The words, the sight, were terrible torture to the honest heart in that boy's breast.

"Maggie, you are now just what you was when you went away—the purest, sweetest, noblest girl that ever lived, and I'll kill the man or the woman who dares to hint otherwise !" shouted Mark Ritter in a white heat of wrath.

She looked up now and smiled at him—the first smile which he had seen that had anything of Margaret Ritter in it. The words went down to the very core and quick of her

heart, to the thought which had cankered there, with bitterest shame and agony.

"Mark," she said, "you are what I called you that last night—the best brother in the world."

And as they sat together by the fire in the silent old kitchen, Mark Ritter drew from his sister the story of all the foul wrong of which she had been made the victim. It was far into the night before she had finished, and it was blacker than his worst fears, or his darkest fancies had ever made it.

Ralph Brainerd had prevailed upon Margaret Ritter to elope with him, through sophistries and falsehoods of the most plausible character. Believing him, as she did, the very soul of truth and honor, it was not strange that his carefully concocted story deceived her.

It is unnecessary to unfold the details of the wily snare which Ralph Brainerd laid for his victim. He succeeded in his infamous purpose of convincing her that his entire fortune was at stake, through the greed and disappointment of a miserly half-uncle, who had destined Ralph for the husband of his only daughter. There was a way, and he made it a smooth and clear one, in which Maggie as his wife, and only as that, could greatly assist him in regaining the property which was at stake.

But there were reasons—Ralph Brainerd made them fair and explicit to the mind of Maggie—why the marriage should transpire in an adjoining State, and be consummated in strict privacy. The necessity for concealment, he argued, would not probably exist longer than a month or two, and at the expiration of that time, Maggie would be quite free to return with him to her home, the beloved and honored wife of Ralph Brainerd.

The shrewd brain, the foul heart, the false tongue!—how was the innocent, loving girl to be fortified against all these?

Ralph Brainerd knew too well the true-hearted, pure-minded woman he had to deal with, to attempt to allure her into any wrong, or even rash step, until he had convinced her reason that it was right. He succeeded in doing this only with infinite pains, and with the arts of "his master, the devil."

Still, Margaret Ritter was very reluctantly persuaded into taking this step. The thought of a midnight flight from

her home was something that her pure instincts utterly recoiled from. She knew, too, the shock which the discovery must be to her old mother and young brother, and pleaded very hard to be allowed to acquaint them with the necessity which circumstances imposed on her. But Ralph Brainerd insisted that the need of silence was absolute, and then the arch deceiver besought Maggie with all the eloquence of which he was master, and in the name of her love, to make this sacrifice for his sake.

But when at last he had won her promise, and the day and the hour was settled for the flight, the thought of her family's dismay and anguish fairly overcame Margaret Ritter. She had solemnly pledged her word to Ralph Brainerd that his secret should be kept inviolate, and so she did not betray it, in the hasty note which she wrote in those last moments, without the knowledge of Ralph Brainerd, and in which, for a time, Mark had anchored his confidence so strongly.

So far Margaret Ritter told her story before she paused. Her courage failed her now. The brother with his blanched face, the sister with her pallid one, looked at each other in the firelight.

"How can I tell the rest, Mark?" she said.

"Because it is my right to know," answered, through his set teeth, Mark Ritter.

And she felt that he spoke the truth, whatever it might cost her to fulfill it. And this was the rest of Margaret Ritter's story.

These two had traveled that night, and through the next day, until it was evening. In an obscure town in Eastern New York, at the hotel where they stopped, Margaret Ritter was wedded to Ralph Brainerd. There were only two witnesses present, and she believed they were as much the dupes of this man, and the false priest, as she was herself.

During the two months that followed, Ralph Brainerd was the tenderest of husbands. They had a quiet, elegant home in the suburbs of New York City, and went out very little, as Ralph still insisted that the necessity for concealment was imperative.

There was one memory, however, which trailed its dark shadow through the otherwise perfect bliss of Margaret Ritter, and that, haunting her at all times, was the thought of the anxious hearts that she knew were watching, and sick

with hope deferred, at home. For awhile Ralph Brainerd attempted to reason and soothe her whenever she recurred to this subject, affirming that in a few days, or weeks at most, he would return with her.

But at last he began to grow impatient of the matter, sometimes treating it lightly, sometimes with a silence which was like indifference. And as time wore away it seemed to Maggie that a slow change came over the man of her worship.

He was absent from home more frequently. It struck her that there seemed some slight irritation in his tones and manner, which she tried to assure herself was only a nervous fancy, and he shocked her occasionally by his covert sneers at her religion. Still it was evident that for a long time Ralph Brainerd hesitated to disclose his villainy to his victim. He kept up the old caressing fondness of tone and manner, he brought her costly gifts, and books, and flowers, that she loved best; and the look of surprised pain and rebuke in her eyes, whenever his manner or speech occasioned it, always brought him to her side, tender and repentant. Still, Margaret Ritter could not disguise to herself the fact that the man for whom she had forsaken her home and her family, was not all she had believed him.

Then a vague dream of some terrible impending evil haunted her by night and by day. It seemed that some terror was approaching her for which she had no form nor name; and this, with the silence which she was compelled to maintain toward her family, and the thought of their suspense, oppressed her spirits and robbed her smile of half its brightness.

All this slowly irritated or estranged Ralph Brainerd. It could not in the nature of things be otherwise. The unsuspecting victim was forever a living reproach to the man who had so foully wronged her; and, as was natural, the sight became at last disagreeable to him. Whether it was possible for the seared conscience of the man to occasion him one pang of remorse, he was well aware of the light in which the world must view his conduct, and his approbationlessness was too active not to give him uneasiness on this score.

Then, too, the part he was playing began to be irksome to him. He was not fond of scenes; he did not enjoy giving pain for its own sake, and his very selfishness, therefore,

made him partially shrink from the disclosure which he knew sooner or latter would come, and it did, in a moment when he had not anticipated it.

One day he returned home in an unhappy mood; something outside had gone wrong; and a spark was all that his anger needed to explode.

Margaret was not well, and low spirited that morning. The poor lonely little wife had been thinking of her mother, and her book had fallen on her lap, and the large tears were on her cheeks, as she lifted it suddenly, when her husband entered.

"Tears again. What are you making yourself a baby for this time, Mrs. Brainerd?"

If the words were not very kind, the unfeeling tones made them a great deal worse.

"Ralph," began Margaret Ritter, and then, heart-sick, she stopped.

"That is not answering my question, Mrs. Brainerd. Will you have the goodness to do it?"

"There is no need, Ralph. You know the one cause of my grief, and are not disposed to remove it."

"Oh, I understand. Harping on the old string again. I should fancy you must be tired of it by this time!"

Margaret Ritter had a latent force and resolution in her character, which circumstances had never eliminated. It roused her now into self-assertion.

"Tired of it, Ralph Brainerd, when the thought of my poor mother, sitting alone in her home, waiting day by day for some tidings of her lost child, is driving me distracted.—She *must* not wait much longer!" the daughter's solicitude and tenderness gaining the ascendancy at last.

"You intend to threaten me then, Mrs. ——," he stopped here, his lips were white.

"No; only to entreat you once more, and for the last time, in pity to my mother's gray hairs, to let me write her, if it be only a word!"

"And in case I see fit to refuse you; what then?"

"Then," and her voice rose, steadyng itself beyond the entreaty which hitherto had filled it, "I have made up my mind, Ralph, I shall write to my mother and tell her where I am."

"You will?" regarding her steadily, with a hard fierceness in his eyes.

"Yes. I *must*. I have made up my mind, as before God. I will fulfill to the uttermost my wifely duties toward you, but these have no right to come utterly betwixt me and my mother."

"Wifely duties!" and Ralph Brainerd laughed to himself—low, bitter, deadly—a sound which fairly chilled his wife's heart, for it was a laugh that could only come from the lips of a villain.

It hurt her too deep for words, and Margaret put up her hands with a quick, deprecatory gesture, as one would to avert a terrible blow.

"There's no use in that now. You've driven me into telling the truth, and must take the consequences.

"What do you mean—what do you mean, Ralph?" asked the poor, helpless girl, with her wild eyes on the man's face; and the terror which for days and weeks had seemed to follow her afar off, drew near now, and wound itself about her soul.

He regarded her a moment as she sat there, with a hard, bitter, derisive glance. Was Ralph Brainerd man or demon, that he could hurl those next words in that ashen-gray face?

"My meaning is simply this—that I have made a fool of you and of myself about long enough, and it's time the farce was played out."

"What do you mean—what do you mean, Ralph?" her voice straining out the words, her bewildered eyes still on his face.

"That is precisely what I am going to tell you. I do at last give my free consent to your returning to your mother, as soon as you choose, and you may carry her this message from me, that you have no farther claim on my protection, as you are not legally my wife!"

She did not believe him now. The infamy that was in these words was too deep for this pure-hearted girl to fathom.

"He must have gone mad, or he would not mock me like this!" she murmured, glancing around the room for help.

"It's the solemn truth, I tell you. I saw from the beginning that you were a pretty little fool, and fair game for me; but if you, or your psalm-singing old mother, or your lubberly brother, had been a particle less the fool than you all were,

you'd have seen that a man in my position could not take to wife a little rustic village schoolma'am, the daughter of a peddling old farmer, in that barbarous corner of the world, where I had the honor to first meet you."

Margaret Ritter rose up with a new strength. She could not tell whether any doubt had entered her soul; but she remembered crying out, desperately:

"I must be dreaming!—Ralph, wake me up; it is all a terrible nightmare! I am your wife. I was married to you. There is the certificate—that proves it."

She heard that deadly chuckle again.

"That was all arranged beforehand; I had a friend who was willing to do a little sly work for me, and your gullibility swallowed down the whole thing without a suspicion; I tell you that marriage ceremony was all a farce."

"Wake me up, Ralph, wake me up!" wailed out of what seemed a thick darkness the soul of Margaret Ritter.

"I tell you you are wide awake. Don't make a fool of yourself, Margaret, nor look at me in that way. I should not have been so savage with you, if you had not exasperated me beyond control."

"Wake me up, Ralph, wake me up, so that I can say, 'It is a dream!'"

"You may as well make up your mind to it now as ever; for, Margaret, it is the truth. You are not my wife!" and he swore a fearful oath to confirm it.

The truth had entered her soul now. She walked up to him, and stood still a moment looking at him, and hoping he would strike her dead at his feet. There must have been something awful in her look, for she remembered that he shuddered, and this man's nerves were iron. Then a cry broke from her lips, low at first but growing loud, and high, and frenzied, as it kept on; a cry in which love, faith, hope, honor, all went down together, and Margaret Ritter lay senseless at the feet of Ralph Brainerd!

## CHAPTER XIX.

AND this was the tale that Mark Ritter listened to that evening sitting by the fire in the old kitchen. Margaret's words moved rapidly along the rest. She never went back into the horror of that scene again; and Mark asked no questions, only his face was white as his sister's, and he took a vow upon his soul that night, which, as yet, was not fulfilled.

Margaret remembered nothing for the three weeks which followed. She must have been very ill and had kindly nursing, although she did not doubt but the two foreign domestics were in the secret of their master's villainy, and were hired accomplices of his.

Margaret did not wake up to the truth at once. It was several days before it all returned to her, and then she was too exhausted for any violent emotion. She was chiefly conscious of a loathing and horror of Ralph Brainerd, which had utterly supplanted her affection for him.

He had not counted on this. It piqued the man's vanity to find that the woman to whom he had disclosed his infamy, regarded him with the same horror that she would an incarnate fiend. If he had offered to atone, so far as was possible for his villainy, by making her his lawful wife, Margaret Ritter would never for one moment have borne his name. In the few brief visits that he made at her bedside, Ralph Brainerd tried to renew the old tenderness, and to soften and explain much that he had said in the folly and heat of passion, as he phrased it, although he never denied the one fact, which it was too late to do now.

As for Margaret, she never spoke to him after that morning, and there was something in the white frozen face which always drove him from her bedside in a few moments.

She was conscious of but one purpose, and that was a perfectly natural one—to fly from Ralph Brainerd, and to hide herself, crushed, broken-hearted, despairing, as far as possible from all who had ever known her. So she laid her

plans on that sick-bed, and executed them with remarkable precaution and skill.

No one suspected that she was able to leave her room the night that she made her escape from the house, with a single change of garments, and all the money and the few jewels she possessed.

These sufficed to carry her two hundred miles from Ralph Brainerd, into a remote district, aside from all public routes, and only penetrated weekly by the stage which brought the mail. She procured board here with a lymphatic but kindly farmer and his wife, whose idle curiosity her dignity and reticence succeeded always in baffling. At any rate, they trusted her story, which simply informed them that she was an orphan; that she had encountered severe losses and trials, and was now seeking only the change and rest which the old farmhouse afforded her.

But that day's work had struck down into the life of Margaret Ritter. Hope nor health came back to her. She passed most of her time wandering in the thick woods of that deep country, where she was almost certain to meet no human face, and where memory goaded her almost into madness; and her only hope and prayer was that she might die.

But as her strength failed gradually, this inward tumult somewhat calmed itself, and Margaret Ritter began to realize that however man might regard her, God and His angels would not pity nor love her the less. The dread and terror with which she had at first contemplated the thought of her home and relatives now slowly vanished.

She never entertained a thought of discovering herself to her family. She had expected to return a proud and happy wife—to receive the joyful welcome of her mother and brother. Could she go back now with her blasted name—she who had been taught to hold its honor a thousand times dearer than her life—could she go back now, the blighted, lost, dishonored thing she held herself, and dare to look in their faces?

But her heart ached, and starved on to look once more upon the dear old home whose doors could never open to her. She could crawl away then, it seemed, into some lonely place, where they had never heard her name, and die silent and happy. So at last, fearful of her waning strength, the girl started for home. Her resources were nearly exhausted,

and entirely failed her before she reached the end of her journey. She had walked a number of miles, and begged sometimes a ride, a night's lodging, or a glass of milk at some farm-house by the road—she, poor, little, shy Margaret Ritter!

"But it was better than I thought, Mark," concluded the girl; and there was almost a smile in her face; "I shall die at home after all!"

"No you shan't, either, Maggie; you shall live here, and we will all be happy again, as we were before. I say you shall!" said Mark Ritter, and he caught the small figure in his great stalwart arms; and in his tumult of grief and rage, he almost defied God or man to take his sister from him.

And so their talk ended, and Mark Ritter knew all there was to know. Margaret was right. There was no power of recuperation in her. All that winter she failed; but she grew more cheerful as her days lessened, and never alluded to the past.

Mark had his hands full that winter, with the failing sister, and the feeble mother. The neighbors were lavish, too, of all kind services of word and deed, and if they suspected any foul play toward Margaret, kept their thoughts to themselves.

She was not so much willing as glad to go, speaking of death sometimes with a smile that was almost joyful, and telling Mark not to grieve for her. "He would live to be a good and happy man," she said, and when at last they all got home together, they would understand whatever had seemed strange and cruel here, and she had left all that with God now, and it troubled her no more. And there came a night in the early spring when, with her blue eyes full of a solemn tenderness, and gladness, too, she looked at Mark and put her hands in his. She never drew her eyes away from him nor her hands either.

In less than a month the old mother followed. Margaret had not even left "good-by" for her; she was sure to come so soon, the daughter said; and the old woman received the knowledge of her darling's death almost without a pang.

That last day her mind had seemed to clear itself. "I am going to father and Maggie!" she said to Mark. "She had had some dreadful wrong and sorrow—I know that. But my little girl's out of its reach now. We shall be a

happy household up there, and wait for you. Remember that, Mark!"

And so there was another grave made in the early spring beside Maggie's, and Mark Ritter was the only mourner.

And beside those two graves, under the shadow of the hills, Mark Ritter had renewed the oath which he had taken on his soul the night that he sat with his sister by the kitchen fire, and listened to her story.

He was not well that summer, and could not leave the old farm, much as he wanted to, for it had lost all attraction for him now.

The next autumn he let it for a long period; that was a year ago, and then he started in search of the man who had murdered his sister; for Mark Ritter felt that his soul would have no rest so long as Ralph Brainerd walked the earth—so long as Maggie slept unavenged in her lonely grave.

Ralph Brainerd had meanwhile gone to Europe. With a deadly determination that braved all obstacles, Mark had determined to follow him there; but before he could obtain the amount necessary for the journey, he had learned of his return—no matter through what agencies. The country youth evinced singular acuteness in ferreting out his enemy.

Mark Ritter had reached Woodleaf on the day that he had met Janet in the woods. He had been in its vicinity ever since.

And so Janet Strong, too, knew all that there was to tell. For over an hour, with her ashen-white face, her hands locked together, she had listened to the story which had never before passed the lips of Mark Ritter.

If it has been a terrible one to you who have read, or I who have written of it, how much more so was it to this girl—this girl whose hour of temptation and peril made the whole to her so real, and vital a thing!

She had lived over that night with Robert Crandall as though its awful stress were once more upon her. She had seen Margaret Ritter in all her girlish innocence and beauty, and knew well with just what shy joy her heart turned toward this man, as hers had once turned in its youth and loneliness toward the sweet solicitations of Robert Crandall. And step by step she had gone with Margaret Ritter, as

though it had been her living self, through all the joy of her love, through all the doubt and struggle that preceded her flight from home. Step by step, as though it were her living self instead of another, had she gone down with her into the slow gathering darkness and fears, into that nightmare of unutterable anguish, out of which her soul had wailed, "Wake me up, Ralph, wake me up!"

And why had she been saved: when this girl, as pure in heart, as innocent in soul, had not been delivered from evil! She too had a mother's prayers, a mother's sheltering love about her life.

Janet looked up wildly through the trees to the sky for God to answer her. Did He sit still up there while such deeds went on beneath His eyes? Ah, just such storms have thundered over the souls of all of us, shaking for the moment our faith to its center. Just such awful facts as these must all of us confront in our lives, and there will follow no answer but that with which Margaret Ritter went to her God. "We shall know all about it some time!" And Janet buried her face in her hands, and sobs for Margaret Ritter tore themselves up from her throat, such as in her bitterest strait she had never wept for herself.

And Mark Ritter wept with her too. That poor sore heart of his was soothed and comforted beyond all that words can express, by the interest and sympathy of his listener. He who had carried his secret burden so long, told it now to one whose name even he had never heard.

"And so you know now why I am seeking this man's life. It is my right. *I shall kill him!*" and he glanced, with a swift fierce flash in his eyes, toward the gun which lay on the grass.

And with a fierce joy, Janet's answered him. It seemed to her at that moment that with her own small right arm she could lay Ralph Brainerd dead at her feet!

A new gladness came into Mark Ritter's face.

"I knew you would think I was right," he said. "His life belongs to me, and he shall meet the death he deserves at my hand!"

But the next moment Janet's quick conscience glided in and rebuked this strange, fierce impulse for revenge. The new doubt was alive in her face, and Mark Ritter read it there.

"Have you any pity for him now, after what I have

told you?" he asked, and his voice betrayed his disappointment.

"Not any," Janet answered promptly. "I should be glad to know that Ralph Brainerd would never curse the world another hour; only, Mark," and she laid her hand on his arm, "I would not have you his murderer!"

"I am not afraid of the name," answered Mark Ritter, sternly.

"Not of the name, but of the sin!"

"It is not sin," speaking swift and vehement, "it is only justice. I know how the world regards these things. I know that there is no law to reach that scoundrel, and I must do it. It is my duty to take his life!"

She saw now what possession of his soul this purpose had taken. For a moment Janet despaired of shaking it, and almost resolved to leave Brainerd to the death that he had brought down on his own head. But another glance at the young, honest, almost boyish face, and that was over.

"No, Mark, his life does not belong to you. 'Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.' "

"And I am executing His vengeance. Shall this fiend go abroad in the world cursing other women as he cursed my sister; bringing other mothers' gray hairs with sorrow to the grave as he brought my mother's, and no law to reach him and no hand to stop him? No, Miss, they may hang me for it, but I shall die knowing that I have done the world good service when I sent that wretch out of it!"

"But it will be taking God's vengeance into your hands, Mark. He will not let this wickedness go unpunished, only we must wait His time and His way."

"His time and His way," repeated Mark Ritter, looking at Janet. "I have doubted whether there was any God in the world, at least any that cared for it!"

"So did I when you were talking a little while ago, and then I remembered that your sister trusted in Him to the end—that she went down into *her* grave believing that His promises and His love would not fail her, and so did your mother. Oh, Mark, you will not let their God go!"

The troubled face glowed suddenly, the thick tears blurred his eyes.

"You are right," he said; "they died trusting in Him. I will not let their God go."

"And it is He who has said, 'Thou shalt do no murder!'"

The old, deadly look came back to his face.

"It is no use to urge me there," he said. "I took my oath by my sister's grave never to stand by it again until I had put that man in his."

One word more she would speak, and in her anguish of entreaty she clasped both of her hands on his arm, while the tears rained over her cheeks.

"Hear me, then, for the last time, for I speak now in the name of your dead mother and sister. I come to you saying what I know that they would in the heaven where they walk to-day, and I adjure you to hear not me, but the dead speaking through me. 'Do not take this man's life, Mark. Leave his punishment, as we have, with God; and do not, as you hope for heaven and us at last, take this man's blood on your soul.'

His face wavered now. Janet could see that the large features worked fearfully. The heavy frame trembled in the silent storm which shook the soul of Mark Ritter. He had listened to Janet as though one spoke from heaven.

Just then a voice came sweet and clear from the front door:

"Janet, Janet, don't you hear the tea-bell?" and she knew that Wealthy Dana was calling her. It would not do to remain longer.

She held Mark Ritter's hands in a very agony of doubt and hope—

"Promise me in Maggie's name—in your mother's, Mark!"

"But my oath! I took it on Maggie's grave," said Mark Ritter, half fiercely, half incoherently.

But the question yielded a great deal. She knew there was hope now.

"Take it back, and lay it down there, saying to her who sleeps beneath it, 'I have not taken God's justice into my hands—they are not stained with blood.'"

"Janet, Janet, where are you?" came the voice of Wealthy Dana through the twilight.

"Promise me, promise me!"

Janet held Mark Ritter's hands as in a vice. He glanced at the gun on the grass. She felt the storm that heaved him, but the answer came in a moment in a broken whisper, given not to her but to the dead:

"I promise!"

"Thank God!" said Janet, and she went out from the trees. She had saved Ralph Brainerd's life!

The reaction which followed this excitement proved how terrible it had been. Janet could never remember how she reached the house. Wealthy must have grown tired with waiting for her, for she was not on the steps; and she heard the ring of the china mingling with the voices of the people in the dining-room. They had seated themselves at the table, and she was thankful enough for a quiet escape to her room. But she was not destined to reach it altogether unobserved, for she met the housekeeper on the stairs, who exclaimed :

"Dear me, Miss Janet, they've been searching for you all 'round. Why, you're white as a ghost!"

"Am I? I believe I'm sick. If I could only get to my room and lie down."

The housekeeper assisted her there, undressed her as though she were a little child—not without many solicitous questions, which Janet found it somewhat difficult to answer.

"The grove is a damp, dark place, Miss Janet. You should not have remained there so late. These heavy night dews, too, at this season, are sure to give one a chill. Your hands feel like ice."

"It is only a little attack of faintness. Don't alarm the family. It will pass off in a few moments," said Janet, faintly.

But the housekeeper did not follow her injunction, as was proved a few minutes later by the three ladies hurrying to Janet's room, full of surprise and solicitation.

Janet had a painful ordeal of questions to undergo, but they followed each other with such eagerness and rapidity, that she succeeded in answering those only which afforded a tolerably plausible reason for her illness.

Mrs. Humphreys, too, stepped in here vastly to her aid.

"I see how it all happened. She went down to the grove after the scarlet leaves, as she says, and sat down on the damp grass, and made poetry, perhaps. How glad I am I'm not romantic! She woke up at last with an ague in all her limbs. Now isn't that true?"

"I didn't make any poetry," answered Janet, while Mrs. Winchester and the housekeeper gravely conferred together.

At this moment Mr. Humphreys presented himself at the door. He had sent for a physician, and learned that the solitary one in Woodleaf was absent.

No one of course had any suspicion—how should they?—

that Janet's indisposition had deeper cause than a physical one; and Mrs. Dean's prescription of warmth and quiet was universally accepted.

"Do not compel me to leave you, Janet," pleaded Wealthy Dana, as she stole back to the bedside, after the united persuasions of Janet and the housekeeper had prevailed upon Mrs. Winchester and her daughter to leave the room. "I will stay and watch with you until you fall asleep."

Here Mrs. Dean interposed her brief authority, and Janet, in her desire to be alone and concentrate her thoughts, blessed the old lady for her dissent.

"But she will never fall asleep at all, if you stay by, Miss Dana."

And at last Wealthy yielded and went away; and a moment afterward Janet heard, with a sick shudder, the voice of Ralph Brainerd in the hall inviting her to walk out with him. What could she do? She lay there in the darkness, and tossed to and fro in the tumult and fever of this question. Sometimes a wild impulse seized her to go down stairs, and confront Ralph Brainerd before them all, with the black crime on his soul; and she would spring up in her bed with this half-formed purpose. But would they believe her?

Ralph Brainerd would either treat the whole story as the senseless ravings of a mind gone suddenly distraught, or coolly insist that the entire matter was forged by an enemy, and the attempt on his life would give him an immense advantage over Mark Ritter, and might lead to the young man's discovery and arrest.

Janet could do nothing wisely for the present, but in that fair autumn evening, under the watching stars, Wealthy Dana was walking with this man! Was she, the sweet and noble girl, listening to the story which he had told not a whit less tenderly in the ear of Margaret Ritter? It would be like this accomplished villain to wait for the last night of their visit before he urged his suit, knowing that on the eve of their parting his words must have a double weight and significance. And would Wealthy Dana listen with that proud head of hers drooped softly—the thought was too harrowing. Janet drove it away, wringing her hands.

"God help her," she prayed, as one sister might pray for another in some awful strait of peril. So, for nearly three hours she lay awake listening for their return, too ill and

agitated to leave her bed, and they all believed her sleeping quietly. At last she heard them enter the house, and she knew by the merry voices and laughter that the others were rallying the two on their long absence.

Not long afterward, Wealthy Dana came to Janet's room.

"What! are you wide awake? Do you feel better, dear?" standing by the bedside, and then leaning over she kissed Janet.

"Not much, thank you. Have you had a pleasant evening, Wealthy?"

"Yes, oh yes," she answered, in an absent way, and it seemed that some great fullness of heart lay behind the words, and held back any further ones for very joy.

Then Janet knew all. A low moan slipped out of her lips.

"Why, are you so ill? Do let me pass the night with you, Janet. It will be our last."

"No, thank you! You will need all the rest for your long journey to-morrow, and the housekeeper will take good care of me."

So at last Wealthy said "Good night," and left her.

Janet had no sleep until dawn. Then she fell into a heavy slumber, and did not awake until the middle of the forenoon. She learned then that the guests had gone.

"We would not waken you out of the sleep which your little pale face told us you needed so much," said Mrs. Humphreys. "Wealthy has a great horror of saying 'good-bys,' but she came into your room and gave you her last kiss; and she and mamma left tender farewells, as did also Mr. Brainerd, that charming man, whose society I shall miss so much."

## CHAPTER XX.

WHAT was Janet Strong to do? Day after day she pondered this question; night after night she prayed God to teach her; and down through the starry silences there came no answer to her troubled soul. She told herself that Wealthy Dana must be rescued from her peril at any cost. Out of her great love and yearning it seemed to Janet that she was ready to give her own life for the rescue of her friend; but her way was so hedged about—she strained her eyes on every side and could find no path.

Should she write to Wealthy Dana? Her pen could never do justice to Margaret Ritter's story; and if she did, would the pure-minded, high-spirited girl believe it? Would she not consider it her first duty to reveal all the facts to her betrothed husband? And how easy it would be for Ralph Brainerd to deny the whole thing! With what semblance of injured innocence and indignant scorn he would do it!

And what proof had Janet of the truth of Mark Ritter's story? Would not Ralph Brainerd insist that the whole was concocted by a villain or a madman? And would not the fact that the other was seeking his life go far to sustain him? Then what better result would follow if she acquainted Mr. and Mrs. Winchester with the facts? They were prejudiced greatly in favor of their niece's betrothed, and it would be utterly impossible to convince them without absolute proof that Ralph Brainerd was the villain, which Janet no more doubted that he was, than she did the existence of her own soul.

Then there was Mrs. Humphreys; but the light-hearted "little bird of a woman" was the last one to be trusted with a secret of this kind, and if left to her own impulses would be likely to do just the most injudicious thing possible. If she could be made to believe the story, she would insist on going with it at once to her parents and cousin; and no

doubt her injudiciousness would give the accused an immense advantage.

But would she believe it? Evelyn was obstinate in her fancies, and Ralph Brainerd was one of these. Would she not espouse his cause with her usual vehemence, and repudiate the whole thing as a foul slander! Plainly there were reasons enough why Janet should not confide in Mrs. Humphreys at this juncture. Then, there was her husband. As Janet's first thought had recurred to him, so did her last.

That Guy Humphreys had some vague suspicions regarding the character of his classmate, his conversation with her had afforded proof; and although these might be now laid to rest, she was certain that he was not so blindly prejudiced in favor of his late guest, as not to judge the probabilities of his guilt with some fairness. But other lions lay in wait here. If he attempted to sift the matter to the bottom she might bring Mark Ritter into trouble, for Guy Humphreys considered it no light thing to attempt the life of a man on his premises, and that man his guest, and had often alluded to the matter in terms of extreme severity.

Would his indignation against the incomparably greater sinner, be strong enough to cause him to forgive the lesser? Mark Ritter had evidently disappeared, but Mr. Humphreys' first step would, in all probability, be to institute a search for him; and Janet feared the country youth would feel that she had betrayed the confidence which he had reposed in her, and which she felt was doubly sacred because she was a nameless stranger to him.

He had, it is true, exacted no promise on her part, but she well knew that he had believed his secret safe with her. Still she must not sacrifice Wealthy by withholding the truth, only she wanted first to secure Mark from the law to which he had made himself amenable. Then it was natural that this modest-souled, pure-hearted girl-woman should shrink from relating the story of Maggie Ritter to any man.

There were times when it seemed that her voice and heart would fail to repeat it, and so, doubtful and perplexed, two or three weeks went over Janet, and found the heavy secret locked up in her own soul. Long before this she had convalesced from her illness, and went about the house and superintended Maude's lessons as before.

Still there was a change which had its roots in her mental

disquiet, and the shock her nerves had undergone. She was absent and startled at the slightest noise, and the pretty buds which used to dawn in her cheeks, and seem always ready to flutter into bloom, had quite disappeared. They all of them noticed the change, and gossiped about it in the kindest way before her face and behind it, and almost embarrassed her by their insistence on quiet and little exertion on her part. Even Maude felt the change. One day Janet's thoughts slipped away from the lesson to the friend she loved best on earth, and her little pupil had twice interrogated her and received no reply.

Janet, indeed, did not know that she had spoken; and Maude put down her book and looked up into her teacher's face with a gaze, half of solicitude, half of curiosity, and then slipping her small, dimpled palm into Janet's, she said :

" You feel bad about something, don't you?"

" No—yes; nothing to talk about," answered Janet, suddenly recalled to the present, and striving to keep the truth in her words, at least; and with a sudden, almost passionate impulse, she flung her arms about the girl's neck, and kissed her over and over. The sight of the little sympathetic face touched her.

There was a witness of all this. That part of the house in which the "study-room," as Maude had christened it, was located, was undergoing some slight repairs, and the lessons transpired that morning in an alcove of the reception-room, where Janet fancied there would be little prospect of interruption.

Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys returned early from their drive, and while the lady ran up stairs to remove her riding-dress, her husband sought the reception-room, as was his habit, to enjoy his papers unmolested. But Maude's words arrested her uncle's footsteps before they were discovered, and Janet's reply did not deceive him so readily as it did her pupil. Some trouble or anxiety lay behind it. The gentleman had quite too high a regard for Janet to dismiss the thought with the knowledge, and there flashed across his mind the question which the physician had asked, whom they had summoned to Janet, the day after her illness, when he had returned home.

When Mr. Humphreys had accompanied him to his chaise, *at the close of his visit, the doctor had said to him, in answer to some query about his patient:*

"She has had no sudden surprise nor alarm of late, has she?"

"Oh, no! nothing of the kind, I assure you, sir?" answered the gentleman, speaking out his first conviction.

"I inquired," answered the astute old doctor, "because it struck me at first that her nerves had undergone some sudden nervous shock, to which her whole system had keenly responded. But in that case time and nature could only restore her, as it will be certain to do now in a few days."

Could it be, Guy Humphreys asked himself, that the doctor's words had, after all, touched the truth? Was there some secret trouble at the bottom of Janet's sudden illness, and the change in her looks and manner? Was there any one in the world who held the right or the power to give her pain? She had distinctly assured them that she had no near living relative, and Janet Strong would tell nothing but the truth—he would stake his life on that.

But he recalled now the search they had had for her that night of her illness, and that they had all taken for granted Evelyn's characteristic explanation of the matter, that "Miss Janet had fallen into a poetical trance," which it was very unlike her to do, for Janet was not given to peculiarities of that kind, whether natural or affected.

Guy Humphreys was quite too well bred, too much of a man, indeed, to intrude himself into other people's affairs; but the slight mystery which always environed Maude's governess, together with his unusual interest in her, stimulated his curiosity; and there was, to do him justice, added to all these, an earnest desire to relieve her from any sorrow which might be oppressing her. Had she met any one in the grove, and was this meeting the cause of her subsequent illness and imperfect convalescence? Mr. Humphreys determined to keep his suspicions to himself, and to watch his "little governess" narrowly. A day or two afterward, Mrs. Humphreys had a headache, and Janet took her place at the supper-table. Maude and her uncle were the only ones present, and after a little natural jesting all around at Janet's position, the host noticed that the young lady's face fell into the slight shadow which had haunted it since her illness.

Her thoughts were evidently far away from the table, and she did not observe that her pupil sustained the principal part in the conversation. Guy Humphreys took his resolve

then. When the meal was over, and Maude had trotted busily off on some childish errand, he walked to the window, and said :

"How finely the sunset tints the tops of those trees in the grove yonder. Have you ever observed this, Miss Janet?"

"Oh, yes," she said, with, for her, a singular lack of interest. "I have frequently admired them."

"It is the interior of the grove, however, I believe, which attracts you more strongly; yet it is hardly a safe or convenient retreat for surreptitious interviews, and dark revelations!"

Vague suspicions only were afloat in the mind of Guy Humphreys. He really intended that his words should seem a mere jest, but, intent on watching their effect on Janet, he put more significance in them than he was aware of. He would, the next moment, have given a good deal to recall his random speech, for Janet's eyes leaped into a swift terror. Her face blanched; she fairly gasped for breath. Had she suffered less keenly of late her self-control would have asserted itself, but now her fears leaped at once to the conclusion that Mr. Humphreys must be informed in some way of her interview with Mark Ritter, and she gasped out, half incoherently :

"Who told you—have you seen him?"

"Seen who? I don't understand you, Miss Janet," answered the gentleman, almost as much bewildered as she was.

"Yes! I see now that you must know all. Don't keep me in suspense, I entreat, Mr. Humphreys."

"All of what, my poor child? There is some dark meaning behind this!"

If Janet had had better mastery of herself at the moment, these answers must have convinced her that Mr. Humphreys was still in the dark with regard to the whole matter. But his first remark, together with his manner of making it, had impressed her with a conviction that he knew all she had longed and feared to tell him.

She tried to answer him; instead of words there was a great sob in her throat. Guy Humphreys was fairly shocked.

Convinced now that his suspicions had a broad ground, and that some real, tangible evil was brooding over Janet, he said :

"Will you trust me—will you tell what the trouble is, and how I can serve you in this matter?"

Wide enough of the truth still, but Janet did not see it in her bewilderment.

"You are not going to arrest him?" she pleaded.

"Janet," said Guy Humphreys, standing close to her now, "there is some wrong here deeper than I see. Some evil threatens you which I cannot comprehend, but I perceive now it has been weighing on you for weeks, and was the cause of your illness. Let me know what it is."

"No—no—not me, but her," she stammered, only half comprehending his words.

"Not you—but her!" he repeated, staring at Janet.

"Yes, threatens her, Wealthy Dana, I mean!"

The gentleman drew a long breath. This was the first glimpse of light which he had had.

"Then it is for Wealthy, and not for yourself"—

She interrupted him here.

"Yes, for Wealthy. I would lay down my life to save her from the fate that awaits her."

Of course Mr. Humphreys had now no scruples in probing this matter to the core. As Janet regained in some degree her composure, it became apparent to her, from the nature of Mr. Humphreys' questions, that he was entirely ignorant of the real facts, but she had inadvertently revealed too much at the beginning to withhold the truth now.

After a little while, however, Guy Humphreys ceased to question. There was no need of it. Once launched upon the tide of her story, Janet did not pause. She kept on, holding nothing back, except once or twice, when her tears did. Guy Humphreys sat still, leaning his head on his hand, listening to every word, making no sign, save that his rapid breaths told Janet that he was deeply excited. No one disturbed them. The sunset went out, and the twilight was quenched in darkness. Neither of these two knew it. Janet was utterly lost in the telling, as Guy Humphreys was in the hearing her story.

She had always shrunk from the thought of repeating Mark Ritter's tale, because she felt it utterly beyond her power to impart to it the wonderful reality and pathos, which he had that evening in the grove. But the story lost nothing in Janet's telling. Her feelings carried her utterly away, as they never would if a like peril had not once stood at her own door.

She painted, as she could not otherwise have done, the picture of the pretty, innocent, trusting country girl, led on by the arts of this accomplished villain to her ruin, for which neither God nor man could hold her accountable; and remembering the sweet enticements of Robert Crandall, Janet almost felt that she was pleading her own cause in Margaret Ritter's. Her intense feeling carried her now out of all fear and shame. From beginning to end she laid bare every scene and circumstance connected with the diabolical plot which had entrapped the little country school teacher, and her own sympathies gave them an awful vividness and reality.

Had the choice been left betwixt Janet and Mark Ritter, no doubt Ralph Brainerd would have preferred the former should disclose his crime to his classmate, but he would have made a mistake. Even Mark could not tell his sister's story as Janet did that night. And when she paused at last there was no more to tell.

Then Guy Humphreys rose up—through all he had not spoken. He brought down his hand on the table so heavily that it sent a shiver through the massive wood.

"The base scoundrel!" he muttered. "He ought to be hanged!"

Janet did not know how every word that she had spoken had carried with it a conviction of its truth to her hearer, and his speech lifted from her soul the great dread which had held her through all her talk, lest he should doubt her story.

"Thank God!" on a long-drawn breath. "You believe it?"

"Every word of it, Janet!"

And she could faintly discern him walking up and down the room in the darkness, and hear him mutter to himself:

"To think he has been under my roof all these weeks, the honored and petted guest of my wife, and that we all have smiled on him, and hung on his talk, and he has turned out in the end such a villain! This explains, too, his conduct that night he was shot. It struck me as singular at the time. No doubt he felt there were men in the world whose vengeance he had reason to fear."

Guy Humphreys was a man of high and honorable instincts. His standard of right and wrong was far more a conventional, than a Christian one, and he might be dis-

posed to regard lightly many things which the latter would absolutely condemn. But to enter her home, and coolly plot the ruin of an innocent and trusting girl, and succeed in his foul purpose by a system of lies and treachery worthy the arch fiend himself, was something which roused, as it must in the heart of any man worthy the name, the strongest indignation of Guy Humphreys.

"And Wealthy Dana may be this man's affianced wife!" said Janet, concentrating here the meaning to which all the previous talk had pointed.

"I have little doubt but she is. In fact Brainerd told me as much that last night of his visit."

"Oh, Mr. Humphreys," pleaded Janet, "we must save her at any cost!"

Then Guy Humphreys sat down by Janet's side.

"Yes, she must be saved," he said, "and I am ready to do anything which lies in my power, and there is no time to lose. Why have you not told me this earlier, Janet?"

"Because—because I had not the courage to, and I was afraid that you might not believe it, or that it would bring Mark Ritter to harm."

"I see, I see; and so you have been sick, and growing pale and thin all this time over that rascal's work—"

"Don't think of me, only of Wealthy Dana. Can she be made to believe what we do?"

"If she can, there is an end of Ralph Brainerd's suit. I know she would then scorn and loathe him with all her high, pure soul; but the man will tell his own story, and you know how he can do it, and Wealthy loves him."

"But we must prove the truth beyond a doubt to her own mind."

"There's the point; to do it, we must get hold of this Mark Ritter; and yet in that case Brainerd will have the advantage, unless we manage very adroitly, because the other attempted his life."

Janet's fears for Mark took alarm again.

"We must not drag him into danger. We must save Wealthy ourselves."

Guy Humphreys rose and walked up and down the room once or twice, then he came and stood before her.

"Janet," he said, "you know how it is with your sex. You know how women, the best and purest, do not visit on our heads a tithe of the condemnation which they do on

yours in things of this kind. Forgive me for speaking so, but you know what men, good women do often marry."

"I know it," said Janet, feeling that the admission against her own sex fairly bowed her to the earth with sorrow and shame. But she rallied in an instant. "Still, any woman who so marries, sins fearfully against her own soul, and in some sense indorses and takes on it another's guilt."

"Ah, if all women only thought and acted so, our sex would be better and purer than it is!"

"But Wealthy Dana—surely you do not mean to include her with these?" faltered Janet.

"No; I regard and honor Wealthy Dana above most women. Bring her for one moment to believe the villainy of Ralph Brainerd, and she would leave him at the foot of the altar. But think how he would gloss it all over if compelled to admit the truth of any part of Mark Ritter's story; and Wealthy loves him, and met him first under *my* roof!" he added, with a pang of self-reproach.

As Janet lifted her hand, she caught the gleam of the emerald ring which her friend had placed there.

"Mr. Humphreys," she said, with a sudden desperation, "we must do something without delay. What is it?"

"In the first place, I shall try to discover Mark Ritter, and perhaps bring him and Wealthy, with her uncle and aunt, together. This may cause a few days' delay, but then it is best to move cautiously."

"And—and," her voice halting, and then hurrying through her question, "do you think it best to acquaint Mrs. Humphreys with the matter?"

It was too dark for Janet to see the slight smile of her listener, for he knew perfectly well Janet's thought at that moment.

"No, I think such a secret would be quite too heavy for Mrs. Humphreys to carry. She would be perfectly horrified, and take such violent sides either for, or against the individual, who you know is now a great favorite with her, that I think it most judicious to preserve her in ignorant bliss."

It struck Janet that, if she had a husband, she should not wish him to speak of her in just that tone. She said nothing, however, and the gentleman added:

"You certainly have acted with marvelous discretion in this matter, only it has cost you too much pain."

Before Janet could reply, the door was burst open; a faint stream of light poured in from the hall.

"Why, uncle," cried the astonished voice of Maude, "you and Miss Janet are sitting here all alone in the dark!"

"So we are, but I'd entirely forgotten it," said the gentleman.

"And so had I," subjoined Janet.

"Oh, wouldn't Aunt Evelyn joke you about it!" exclaimed the child, who had an almost precocious relish of Mrs. Humphreys' pretty jests.

"Tremendously, I suspect!" laughed the gentleman, as he took the child and seated her on his knee.

That night, when Janet knelt down by her bedside, she remembered that God had answered her prayer in a way that she had not looked for.

## C H A P T E R   X X I.

Two weeks had gone. Meanwhile, the headache which had confined Mrs. Humphreys to her room one memorable evening, had developed itself into a fever, which, though not dangerous, had prevented her husband from leaving home.

He had, however, taken every measure in his power to discover Mark Ritter, but had failed to learn anything concerning him. He had disappeared from that vicinity, without affording the slightest clew to his destination.

Mr. Humphreys had at last resolved, after conferring with Janet, to go to New York as soon as his wife's convalescence admitted, and inform Mr. and Mrs. Winchester of the revelations which had transpired respecting Ralph Brainerd, and take counsel with them as to the time and method of acquainting Wealthy with the real character of her betrothed.

Mr. Humphreys, aware of his cousin's fondness for Janet, felt that no one could tell Margaret Ritter's story so well, and was anxious Wealthy should hear it from Janet's lips; but no ostensible reason could be invented for her visit to New York, and Evelyn was not strong enough now to be trusted with the real one. So Mr. Humphreys must go alone, and he had decided to do this the last of the week.

It was now late in November, and there had come, like a faint memory of the lost summer, two or three days of warm sunshine and south winds, sprinkled with the year's last fragrances. Mrs. Humphreys had taken a fancy to visit the friends where she and Guy had been in the spring, and they had now been absent for three days.

Meanwhile the weather changed; a storm set in, on whose wings the winter came down sudden and furious.

On this night of which I write, Janet Strong sat alone in her chamber. Outside the snow shook its white banners in the air, the winds tore through them with a fierce joy, plucking at the bare branches, raving in wild exultation through

the night, and hurling the snow in sheets against the windows.

There was something in the wild spirit of a storm like this in which Janet usually took delight. The plunge and roar of the wind would have called to something in her, which seemed to rise up and shake its wings too, and go out on the storm. But now the anxiety at her heart was too keen for the winds to bear away. Her affection for Wealthy Dana had struck very deep roots in her nature; and as Janet's friendships were so few, so were they the more intense.

She constantly feared that Ralph Brainerd would return to New York before Mr. Humphreys should reach the city, although the gentleman hardly participated in this fear, fancying, from some hints which Ralph Brainerd had dropped in his presence, that the business which summoned him West was of an imperative nature, and would detain him until the close of the year.

Janet had heard but twice from Wealthy, brief notes in both cases, evidently holding back whatsoever was most vital, and touching only on surface matters. Still Janet fancied that she could detect, underlying the light phrases, the throb of some new strength and joy, whose very power and sacredness held back Wealthy's words.

Janet was, however, very thankful for this, as it kept back all necessity of comment on her part. Wealthy's silence, too, at this crisis, her friend conjectured, was partly owing to her impression that, however much the little governess might admire Ralph Brainerd, he did not possess, in the fullest sense, her confidence.

But as she sat in her chamber thinking on all these things, a servant knocked at the door with a letter. It was in Wealthy's handwriting, and post-marked at Dayton, the small inland town where Wealthy's mother had been born, and where she still retained the old country-seat, and was herself in the habit of visiting it several times each year.

Janet tore open the letter and the meaning out of it. This one was longer than the others, and evidently written in a tumult of haste and excitement. Wealthy Dana was to be married that week—not earlier than Thursday! Ralph Brainerd had returned from the West a month ago, and his impatience brooked no delay.

Then he hated ceremonious weddings; so did Wealthy, and she had at last persuaded her uncle and aunt into allowing the marriage to come off quietly under the old home roof at Dayton, "like a couple of romantic, moon-struck lovers," as they were, Mr. Winchester insisted.

He and his wife, however, would be present; and Wealthy must have her cousins, and Janet also, at the ceremony. They would not fail her, she knew. She had not expected to be married for a year, but Ralph—*her* Ralph—had persuaded her that it was best; that he could not wait, as men with slower hearts and fainter love could, for this the crowning joy of his life. And through the brief letter throbbed, and in the closing lines in which she prayed Janet to come to her, the deep exultant joy of Wealthy Dana's heart.

The mail which brought Janet's letter, brought another also from Wealthy to Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys, announcing Wealthy's anticipated marriage, and inviting them to the wedding. Both letters had been unaccountably delayed for two days.

If her friend had been brought in and laid dead at her feet, I doubt whether Janet would have been paler than she was when she put down this letter.

It was too late to ask counsel of any human being now. A letter would not reach Guy Humphreys before to-morrow evening, and then it would be too late. But save Wealthy Dana, with the help of God, she would, and Janet knelt down by the bedside, and when she rose up her resolution was taken.

The train would be along in less than an hour. By taking it, she would intersect another, which would bring her to Dayton before sunset of the following day. It was her only chance.

Janet left a brief note for Mr. Humphreys, explaining the cause of her absence, and then went down to the house-keeper's room.

"Mrs. Dean," her steady eyes burned out of a pallid face, "I am going to order Samuel to carry me over to the depot—I shall be gone for a day or two!"

Mrs. Dean put down her work in blank amazement, and stared helplessly at Janet.

"Going off in such a night as this—it will be the death of you!"

"I think not; but even if I knew it would, I doubt

whether *that* would alter my determination to start. It is a case of more than life or death that takes me away."

"But such a night as this!" again persisted the house-keeper, uncertain in her own mind whether Janet had lost her wits and gone suddenly mad. "If Mr. Humphreys was only here."

But Janet had already gone in search of the coachman.

Great was that lymphatic individual's consternation when he received Janet's order, issued with a quiet authority which alone insured his obedience after his first expostulations.

"It's not fit for a dog, lettin' alone a woman, to be out on such a night as this."

"I do not deny that, Samuel, only if the carriage is not here within fifteen minutes, I shall set out for the depot on foot!"

Mrs. Dean had descended to the kitchen with some vague notion of conspiring with the servants to lock Janet up; but when she caught these last words, and met the dead resolution of Janet's eyes, the old lady felt utterly powerless for any such coercion.

She followed Janet up to her room, however, and assisted her in the rapid preparations which she made for her journey, and taking care above all that she was properly wrapped up for it. And when Samuel drove up with the carriage, Janet, warmly cloaked and shawled, stood waiting in the door. Mrs. Dean and the servants had followed her, frightened and bewildered. At the last moment she turned and said :

"Don't be alarmed for me, Mrs. Dean—I know what I am about; I am doing my duty, and God will take care of me." Then she went out into the wind, and snow, and darkness.

The train was late that night; they waited for nearly an hour at the depot. At last Samuel saw Janet safely on board, and then there was a hiss and a shriek that reminded her of the cry of a wild beast in rage and terror, and they swept off into the darkness. She looked around her; in the faint light a few heads showed themselves above the high seats. She was the only woman in that car.

She began to feel frightened. She tried to realize what she was doing. It all seemed like a dream. She rubbed her eyes and tried to wake up. Where was she going?—and for what? Would Wealthy Dana listen to her or be-

lieve her? Would Ralph Brainerd be there with his false heart and smooth tongue to swear that her story was all a foul lie? Poor Janet! her heart failed her; and then she remembered her last words to Mrs. Dean,—that God would take care of her. She leaned up against that thought, as against a strong prop, her faltering soul. He, sitting in the calm and joy of heaven, and looking down on her heart now, knew that her motives were right ones; she need not blush before His angels—she would not fear the face of man, though that man were Ralph Brainerd!

The cars plunged on through the awful night, the red lights glaring out wildly into the blackness. Janet's whole life rose up and passed before her. Little scenes and circumstances that she had forgotten, far down in her childhood, came back to her vivid and real, as though they had happened yesterday.

Now she was a very little girl playing at her mother's knee, or puzzling her small head over the letters painted on the box of cards which she had been told was her father's last gift. And now, grown older, she was standing on tip-toe in a darkened room, and sobbing as though her heart would break, as she looked down on the white, peaceful face there—the face which they told her would never smile on her any more—the one dear face in all the world for Janet Strong, and which they were to lay away under the grass in the dark and mould! She cries now with just the same feeling that she had then to think of it.

And now she has grown older still and works in the factory, and almost everybody has a pleasant word or a kindly smile for the little orphan, but no eyes ever look at her with the sad yearning of those eyes which have slept so long under the grass, and everywhere the little childish heart carries its vague sense of loss and loneliness.

Then a little later she has come, curious, wondering, and half bewildered, to the city. The strange, dreary days at Mrs. Kenneth's, where her heart went sick for home and love, break over her again. And then that night comes back to her when she walked, sad and solitary, up and down Mrs. Kenneth's parlor, and Robert Crandall first met her. She lives through all the sweet flutter and pleasure of that time, through all the bliss of the days that followed, with the little vague doubt and uneasiness that crept through all, and that grew and grew until Janet found herself in the

midst of that awful struggle, when angels and fiends might have contended for her. She lives over all that time again, *that* night with its doubt, its sharp anguish, its final decision.

"Thank God! oh, thank God!" cries out Janet, thinking of Margaret Ritter; but the rush of the train drowns her voice.

Then she wonders a little about Robert Crandall. How completely he filled her life once—how utterly he has gone out of it now! What has become of him? Despite the terrible wrong that he was tempted to do her, there was good in him. Has she changed so much in all these years? Would he know her now if she stood before him?

And, later, she has broken away from all these things, and is devouring her books in the country, toiling at her studies by night and by day, her highest ambition to become the teacher of the red district school-house. And a little later she has gained her desire, and sits before her desk in the long, low school-room, with its rows of bare benches, and its little and big boys and girls, the larger part unkempt, coarse and obstreperous. And the hunger and the weariness are on her soul still.

And a little later all this has changed. She has left the barren little school-house, and the tedious lessons forever. The new, pleasant, luxurious life has opened its doors to her. How easily she sinks into it. In a little while it seems natural. She can hardly realize, except occasionally, that she has not been surrounded by these things all her life.

She is not a hireling, she is a friend, treated always as an equal, and with a delicacy and kindness by her patrons which she never had dreamed of. And then she comes with a kind of shock into the present. She, Janet Strong, is sweeping on through the dead night all alone, seeking to rescue the woman whom she loves best on earth, though she stands at the altar with her marriage vows on her lips!

How little Janet ever thought such a part would fall to her! And then she remembers how often she has felt in her hours of loneliness and heart-sickness, that she hardly had a right to live. She has said to herself sometimes that nobody in the world was better or happier because she was in it. No sweet home-loves or duties, no dear ties of family or relative were hers. But now these thoughts rebuked her.

If she saved Wealthy Dana from wedding this villain, her life would not be in vain.

Ah, Wealthy Dana, the beautiful heiress, the accomplished, fascinating girl, had many friends among men and women, many who sounded her praises loudly and courted her society always, but amid all these there was not one heart so faithful, so loving, so steadfast as that of the little governess who was hurrying alone through the darkness to her rescue!

What a long night that seemed! Toward morning Janet fell into an uneasy sleep, and she did not awake until the train stopped at the depot, from which the road she was to take branched off in another direction. It was quite light now. She felt tired and hungry, and ordered some refreshment at the little village restaurant, but she could not eat.

The fury of the storm was over now, though it still brooded black and sullen in the sky. The snow had drifted the roads. She had a dreary time waiting for the train. It was late in the morning before it appeared. Then there were frequent pauses at the villages among which the railroad skirted, so their progress was tantalizingly slow to Janet's impatience, and the short November day was fading into night before she reached Dayton.

The old "Dana Homestead" was built of gray stone, and dated back nearly a century, but it had been carefully preserved by three generations of owners, as had also the general physiognomy of the grounds, and the fine old trees; and the wide sweep of grass reminded one in summer of some old English lawn. Janet, however, scarcely gave a glance at house or grounds as she alighted from the stage which she had taken at the depot.

Wealthy Dana sat alone by her chamber window in the twilight. Blissful visions of a future such as was never granted the heart of a woman to realize, thronged her thoughts. And amid them, in a half absent way, the young girl noticed a small figure heavily cloaked and veiled which came slowly, like one wearied with long travel, up the walk, and she certainly would at another time have felt considerable curiosity about the face underneath the close veil.

It was a marvelous proof of Ralph Brainerd's magnetic power, that he had inspired such a woman with such fondness for him in three months' acquaintance; that in that time her heart had been won, her hand promised, and her

wedding-day appointed close at hand. He knew perfectly well the character of his betrothed when he solicited a quiet and private wedding. Wealthy's nature was not one which took delight in parade and ostentation ; and it was naturally more consonant with her feelings that her marriage should be celebrated under the old family roof, in a little circle of cherished friends, instead of transpiring in the city amid her crowds of gossiping acquaintances, with the pomp and ceremony which would be indispensable adjuncts there, and from which her soul shrank at this time.

"We can have our receptions and all that, aunt, when we return to the city," she said to Mrs. Winchester.

Mr. Brainerd had left Dayton the previous day on some business, and would not return at the earliest before to-morrow evening. Janet learned this before she entered the house, and—gave thanks to God ! She went up alone to Miss Dana's room, the housemaid staring at the request, but politely directing her. There was a soft knock at Wealthy's door, and then it opened, and the heavily-cloaked figure entered and threw back its veil, and Janet Strong stood before Wealthy Dana. Had she dropped from the clouds at her feet the latter could not have been more amazed. That her joy equaled her surprise none could have doubted who heard her cry as she sprang forward :

"But what does it all mean?" disengaging herself after the manner of a loving woman, not usually prodigal of her caresses, and concentrating much fervor in these. "How have you come here, and where are Guy and Evelyn?"

"I came alone, Wealthy!"

"Alone—and through the storm of last night!"

"I believe I should have looked death in the face and braved him to get to you!"

At midnight these two girls sat alone together, and both faces were white as the dead. You had only to look at them to know that one had spoken and the other had listened. It was long, though, before Wealthy could be brought to hearken.

"I shall be Ralph Brainerd's wife in forty-eight hours," she said, with a kind of proud defiance to Janet, "and if it is any evil concerning him that you have come to tell me, as I see it is from your face, I have no right to listen to it, saving in his presence, where you shall tell it, and where I know he can prove the whole a slander and a lie."

Worthy of a better man was loyalty like this. Janet made no answer. Was it all lost then—the long, weary journey, the struggle, the anxiety, the prayers by day and night! Must she go back as she had come, with the loss of Wealthy's love, for she had snatched her hand away at the first word which touched her betrothed, and was regarding Janet with fierce defiance.

For a moment she bowed her face helplessly in her hands, and then Janet looked up again.

"But, Wealthy," she said, and her face was stern too, "before you send me away I claim my right to be heard—the right of one who only a few weeks ago saved the life of Ralph Brainerd!"

"Saved Ralph's life—my Ralph's!" fear, and tenderness, and amazement all at strife in her face. "What are you saying, Janet?"

"The truth as before God. There was no escape for him—he must have been in his grave before this day if it had not been for me!"

There was no doubting Janet now. Wealthy laid both of her hands in her friend's, and the proud girl sobbed passionately:

"Yes, Janet, if you saved *his* life, you only of all the world have earned the right to say what you will."

And then Janet spoke. She talked now like one inspired; as Guy Humphreys even had not heard her. There was more at stake now. And Wealthy sat with her strained eyes and her white face and listened. She told herself through all the story that it was a lie from beginning to end, not of course of Janet's making, but of some enemy of Ralph Brainerd's, and tried to steady her soul against that conviction; but sometimes, despite herself, a great wave of pity, or horror, or indignation would rush over her, as scene after scene in the sad drama fell from Janet's lips, and she would half forget that he who had wrought all this misery was her affianced husband, and find herself hating this other villain.

So, at midnight, the story was over. The two girls sat there with white faces. I think at that moment Wealthy Dana hated Janet Strong. We are apt to recoil from those who bring us evil tidings, or occasion us great suffering, and it was terrible to break in upon the glowing visions of this affianced bride with such a story, for had a tithe of it been true to Wealthy Dana, she would have walked right down

into her grave sooner than to her marriage with Ralph Brainerd. And she could neither comprehend, nor regard all that Janet had done and suffered for her sake. She could only tell herself fiercely, over and over again, that it was all a lie, that she did not, and would not believe it. And this Janet saw in her face as she looked.

"You do not believe it?"

"No; did you think I would?" Her voice was steady and cold, but her eyes seemed flashes of living fire.

"I was afraid, and yet I thought when you came to hear my story, and know, too, how far I have come, all alone for love of you, Wealthy, you would grant my request?"

"What is that?"

"That you will not see Ralph Brainerd until you do it in Guy Humphreys' presence. He will be here by day after to-morrow; and if all I have told you is false, surely Ralph Brainerd will be able to prove it to your relative, and his own friend and classmate."

"And I shall thus prove to him"—in a voice of proud anger—"that the woman who has promised to be his wife day after to-morrow, has not faith in his honor, and doubts whether he is not the blackest villain that breathes air—I thought you knew me better, Janet Strong!"

"Well, then, Wealthy, there is no more to be done," said Janet, with the slow tears of exhaustion and despair dripping down her cheeks. "I left home last night in the storm, and came here all alone because of my love for you, and because I would have given my life to save you from a union with this man. But it has done no good. I call God to witness that there is no more that I can do, and that I would have saved you. I shall go back to the depot and return home at once, as I made up my mind to, if you would not listen to me. Good-by, Wealthy!" and she walked to the door.

And just as she was closing it without one word from her friend, Wealthy's voice came to her faintly, with a little plea ringing in it—"Do not go, Janet." And Janet turned and looked at her. Her face was hard and pinched sitting there. The old tenderness burst in a great tide over Janet's soul. She came back once more.

"Oh, Wealthy," she said, "I do not plead now in my own name, nor in that of Guy Humphreys, nor even for the sake of your own happiness, but I plead in the name of your

mother among the saints in heaven, and I say only what I know that she, standing here would say to you now—‘Wait, my child, until Guy comes ! ’ ”

There was no answer, only Wealthy Dana shivered in the silence from head to foot. Janet closed the door. She carried her heavy heart down the stairs and through the hall; but as she reached the end of it, there was a sound of hurrying steps, and Wealthy Dana, with her deadly-white face, stood at her side—

“Stay, Janet, and I promise you I will not see Ralph Brainerd until Guy comes.”

And whatsoever Wealthy Dana promised, that thing she would do.

## CHAPTER XXII.

IT was noon the next day before Janet and Wealthy met again. Both looked as though they had grown years older during the past night. Toward morning Janet's overstrained nerves had given way, and she had fallen into the heavy slumber of utter prostration, from which she did not arouse until nearly mid-day.

Wealthy Dana tried to be polite to her guest, but Janet saw what it cost her to be simply this. She knew with the first glance, that her very presence was painful to her friend, who had been. She knew, too, that Wealthy regretted the promise that Janet's solemn adjuration had extorted from her—that she had fortified herself anew in faith in Ralph Brainerd, which, for one moment, had perhaps been slightly shaken.

No allusion was made to him on either side, but there was a silent defiance in Wealthy's face and manner, which Janet understood.

All feeling, however, of indignation or wounded self-love was drowned in pity for her friend. She had risen to that height which our human nature seldom attains, when self is wholly lost sight of.

She did not, in her deepest thought, accuse Wealthy of ingratitude, as was most natural. She entered with her keen sympathies into all the feelings which at this crisis would be likely to take possession of Wealthy's soul, and would result in defiance and anger.

The talk flagged drearily on both sides, although each made spasmodic efforts to keep up some show of conversation on commonplace subjects, with their thoughts wholly engrossed elsewhere. If Wealthy could have looked in Janet's eyes, the sad pity which they held, must have found its way to a heart which, despite its faults, was quick and tender as a child's. But Janet's face was not pleasant to her then. In her heart she almost hated her, and averted her gaze as much as was possible.

So there was nothing for Janet to do but to wait, and pray God to speed, and to keep from all mischance of storm, or delay of accident, Guy Humphreys.

After dinner was over, and the young ladies had returned to the sitting-room, and the conversation had trickled over a good many topics, in which neither felt the shadow of any interest, Wealthy said to her guest:

"I've got a dreary sort of headache. Will you excuse me if I lie down for an hour? There are some portraits of our family, and fine landscapes in our parlor, which I think will interest you. John knows their names, and will take a great deal of pride in displaying them."

She had rung the bell before Janet could reply. Indeed, the latter was too much absorbed to have any thought about herself, and would probably have followed submissively whatever Wealthy suggested. John made his appearance in a moment. He was an old serving-man, who had been in the family since his boyhood, and was devoted to its interests, heart and soul. Janet had often heard Wealthy speak of him, for her mother, with whom he had grown up, had always treated him as an humble friend, rather than a servant.

John Bell was by birth an Englishman, but his parents had died soon after their removal to this country. He had no near living relatives. His wife had died young, and with that peculiar tenacity of affection which was a part of his nature, he had never allowed her place to be superseded.

Mrs. Dana, the mother of Wealthy, was not out of her tenth year when John Bell came, a clumsy, ignorant boy, to her father's roof. He had never forgotten the sweet-faced little girl, who looked at him curiously, and smiled at him kindly, and always had a pleasant word for him, until they grew familiar with each other, and she learned to confide all her childish joys and sorrows to him.

After Mrs. Dana's marriage, John still remained in the family. Indeed, nothing could ever induce him to leave it, and the attachment he had felt for Wealthy's parents, was on their death concentrated on their only child.

John was trustworthy in every respect, diligent, shrewd, and faithful in all his affairs. He had the whole management of the grounds, and in some sense, of all Wealthy's interests.

John had a square, stolid figure, with a quantity of brownish-red hair, a little obstinate and inflexible, like its owner. He had large, rugged features, with a wide, no-surrender sort of mouth. Wealthy always insisted, laughingly, that there was a kind of "picturesque homeliness" about John's face. The eyes were its best feature—bright, deep-set—you would neither doubt his honesty nor sagacity, could you but once get a look down into them.

Janet had only seen the man once, when he had come up the preceding evening to receive some orders from Wealthy, and had remained in the room a few minutes, as was his habit. His young mistress had presented him to her guest, and Janet had not failed to observe the cordial grasp of his hand, nor the smile which illuminated the homely face of the serving-man, as he said, "I've heard a good deal about you, ma'am."

But he had evidently detected something was wrong before he left the room. To-day, in as few words as possible, Wealthy confided Janet to his care. The latter followed the faithful old serving-man down stairs, and into the great parlor, and watched him as he removed the wrappings from the portraits and pictures. Under other circumstances, they would have furnished her with interest and delight for the afternoon. The large old parlor seemed suddenly stained with a glow of warm mist from the landscapes that flamed their glory along the walls. And then, there were Wealthy's father and mother, the stately gentleman, the gentle, fair-haired lady, whose only child combined many of the physical and mental qualities of both her parents.

Janet, however, gazed on as one in a dream. She was wondering all the time whether Ralph Brainerd would arrive that night; and if he did, whether he would not suspect something was wrong, and force his way at all hazards into Wealthy Dana's presence.

John Bell darted at her several times a keen glance from under those shaggy eyebrows of his, where the gray eyes burned bright and steady. At last, he spoke:

"You don't seem to enjoy the pictures to-day, ma'am?"  
This speech aroused her.

"I should, John, under other circumstances; but I have some anxiety on my mind, which excludes everything else."

"Is it about her?" nodding in the direction of the door.

Janet turned and looked at him. The rough, honest face

bore her scrutiny well. In her perplexity and fear, a sudden impulse seized her to confide in this man. He might help her. He only could prevent Ralph Brainerd's entrance that night, if the latter was bent on effecting it.

She remembered, too, all that his mistress had told her of John's marvelous intuitions of character, and how she had never known his opinion of any person fail, sooner or later, to justify itself.

"Yes, John, it is about her," answered Janet.

"I knew something was wrong from her face. It is the first time she ever kept any trouble away from me."

Janet did not know what Wealthy did, that Ralph Brainerd was no favorite with John. He had never said this; but his young mistress knew his manner too well not to detect it, and this accounted for her failing to confide in him at this crisis.

Ralph Brainerd had taken especial pains to conciliate the faithful old friend of the family, but through the blandishments of his speech and manner, the sturdy soul of John Bell had, in a vague way, penetrated to something hard and false beneath. Still, he could get hold of nothing to convince himself or his mistress of the truth of what he discerned so dimly; and so he watched the progress of the engagement with a kind of impotent sullenness.

Janet's next speech came in broken, half-incoherent sentences; but John grasped the meaning of each. His rugged face was all alert now, kindled into a greedy eagerness.

"I came here all alone, to save her. She will not believe me. He is a vile, wicked man!"

"Ralph Brainerd, do you mean, ma'am?"

"Yes, I mean him, John," the question calming, and clearing her thought and speech.

"I thought as much," said John Bell. "I al'ays feared there was somethin' wrong and rotten behind that smooth, slick tongue, and them soft manners o' his. Oh, Miss Strong!" and the pathos which smote through his voice and his face would have touched a heart harder than Janet's—"I love that child as I did the little one I laid years agone by the side of her mother, out yonder in the graveyard; and if any harm should come down on her bright, young head, that I've dandled so often when it was a little baby's, and she fatherless and motherless now, it would jest be worse than death to me! And if he's a bad man, he

isn't a-goin' to have my Miss Wealthy, if I shoot him, first!" getting up, and clinching his hard hand.

"He is a bad man. I cannot tell you, John, how I came to know it—only, it is the living truth,—he crossed the path of a young, pretty, innocent girl in humbler life, and with fewer friends to protect her than your young mistress. He won her heart—you will not wonder at that—and persuaded her to elope with him, and they were married, as she thought. And then in a little while, when he grew tired of her, he told her the marriage was all a mockery and a lie. She ran away from him, and after awhile the poor, broken-hearted little thing went home to her old mother, and her young brother, to die. He broke her heart, and he broke the old mother's, and they lie side by side, now, the two lonely graves, crying day and night unto God for vengeance on the head of their murderer—that man whom Wealthy Dana is to marry to-morrow night, and I have come here to save her, and she will not believe this, and she has ceased to love me!" And the slow tears ran down the face that sat before John Bell.

An oath—the first one which he had ever uttered—a curse on the head of Ralph Brainerd, slipped out of the lips of John Bell.

"Oh, don't—don't, John; its wicked!" cried Janet.

"I know it is; the Lord forgive me! But when I think of that villain's comin' here, with his lyin' tongue and smooth ways, and stealin' the heart of that darlin' child, and her father and mother in their grave, as it seems, must rise from it if they knew—it makes me long to get my hands on him." His face ablaze up to the roots of his thick hair—"I can see through him now, plain as a winder; it's Miss Wealthy's fortin' he's after."

"I have no doubt of that, John. But will he be here tonight, do you think?"

"Most likely. He's been a hangin' 'round pretty steady for the last month."

"But she has given me her solemn promise that she will not see him until her cousin, Guy Humphreys, comes, who will be here some time to-morrow; but if Ralph Brainerd suspects anything wrong, he will make his way through any obstacles into Wealthy's presence."

"He'll have to do it over my dead body, then—confound the villain, savin' your presence, ma'am!" answered John,

setting his sturdy figure into an attitude of defiance which few men would care to encounter.

And then it was all arranged between them. John was to wait on the door that evening. He would secure every bolt and fastening, so that it would be impossible for any stranger to gain admittance. John's rule was absolute in the domestic department, for various reasons, and he was certain of coadjutors there, if circumstances required them.

The short December day was drawing into night while these two were laying their plans to defeat Ralph Brainerd. It would not do for Janet to remain any longer away from her hostess; but as they left the parlor, the chambermaid came suddenly upon John, and said to him :

"I've been searchin' for you everywhere. Miss Wealthy wants to see you in her room."

John went up stairs at once, with a suspicion of the nature of his young mistress's orders, which proved to be the true one.

"I'm sick this evening, John," she said. "There—don't ask me any questions!" with a nervous avoidance of the whole subject. "You shall know all after awhile; but I cannot see any person who calls, before some time to-morrow—not even Mr. Brainerd, should he arrive to-night, which I faintly expect. You must wait on the door faithfully, for I do not choose to confide my orders in this matter to the servants;" and she turned her head away in a manner that said more plainly than words, she did not wish any comments on her singular orders.

John stopped a moment, his heart yearning over the proud, pale face that buried itself against the cushions of the easy chair, locking its perplexity and silence underneath, in frigid reticence.

There was no mother, he thought, for the young heart to go to, in its grief and pain; and he drew his hard, horny hand across his eyes and left the room.

Wealthy was perfectly aware that John's acuteness would lead him straight to some suspicion, that all was not right betwixt her and Ralph Brainerd, but she was too wretched to mind that now. Indeed, she was just then in a state of proud, sullen indignation with all the world.

Janet found her much as she had left her; the same forced politeness, which was harder to bear than the bitterest upbraiding.

They were both more reticent than in the morning, for Wealthy was brooding darkly over the orders which her promise to Janet had compelled her to give, in case Ralph Brainerd should arrive, and wondering whether he would be offended at her refusal to see him, and telling herself that the story which Janet had related was all a foul slander on her betrothed, invented by the man who had sought his life. And below, John Bell, that faithful old serving-man, who would have gone to prison or to death for the love which he bore his young mistress, was carefully securing every lock and door, and accounting for this unusual proceeding on his part, to the cook and housemaid, by assuring them in a tone of voice which carried immense weight with it, that he had "good reasons for fearin' somebody might be tryin' to get into the house that night, that had better by all odds keep out!"

Of course, their superstitions and fears pointed directly to ghosts and burglars. There was no use, however, to question John, when he was disposed to keep his own counsel. But he had gained his object. He was certain that no one would leave the house that night, or loosen a fastening without his knowledge.

The supper was over at last, and the two girls had gone up stairs once more. Both of them went to the windows, and put aside the curtains. It was a still night, not cold for the season, though one smooth white linen of snow covered everything. Clouds, dark and broken, scattered themselves all over the sky, and golden rills of stars shone betwixt them.

"Do you think Guy will be here in the early train?" asked Wealthy, coming nearer to all that was in the thoughts of both, by this question than she had done that day.

"I hope so. It will depend upon the time that my message reached him."

And just then the girls caught the far-off shriek of the locomotive, clutched up eagerly by the echoes among the distant hills, and shaken back and forth. Did that train bring Ralph Brainerd? Janet asked this question with a shiver, and Wealthy did with another, of tenderness and anger and self-reproach, such as had held tumultuous possession of her soul all day.

The eyes of both turned simultaneously toward the distant cleft in the hills, out of which the locomotive always

came, with its plunge and snort, and glare of its lights, like some hunted behemoth of the wilderness. In a moment they heard its rush and cry. The next, it thundered out, the blue and crimson lights flashing and throbbing along the darkness. It plunged past them toward the little depot, a mile off, from which Janet had come the night before. Then the girls turned and looked at each other, knowing well what was in each heart, but neither spoke.

The evening papers had been brought in, and Wealthy offered one to Janet, and took another herself. Neither, however, could have told a line of what she read. For the next hour they sat together, with white faces and strained sense, starting at every sound.

Ralph Brainerd had told Wealthy that it was doubtful whether circumstances would not detain him until the following night. How eagerly she hoped now that they would prevent his coming. But it was not to be. In her heart each of the girls had begun to congratulate herself that he had been detained, when the loud peal of the door-bell, reaching up to the distant sitting-room, put all such hopes to flight.

Both of the girls started at that sound as though a blow had hurt them, and a quick groan slipped out of Wealthy Dana's lips, half of it caught back and stifled under her next breath. And in the intent listening which followed, they heard John's heavy tread, as he moved along the passage, and the unboltling of the door.

For the next two minutes their senses, almost preternaturally acute, caught no sound; then the door suddenly swung to, with a sharp, angry clang, as though some one, seeking to enter forcibly, was shut out.

Wealthy Dana's self-possession, which she had maintained during the day, was fast forsaking her. She shivered from head to foot, and then suddenly sprang up and turned to Janet, while her eyes blazed fiercely:

"What did you come here for, Janet Strong, and extort out of my weakness a promise, that I would not see Ralph Brainerd to-night—the man for whose sake I would give up every other friend I have on earth?"

"I have told you *why*, Wealthy." It was all the defense Janet made. I think at that moment she wished she had not come.

Wealthy took no notice. She went on, in a hurried, passionate way:

"It is cruel to treat him like this. He will not understand my refusal to see him, and will be justly hurt and offended. And if he insists on coming in, I know John well enough. They will have high words together."

"I hope not. I would prevent that if I could," said Janet, hardly knowing what she said, in the misery and excitement of the moment.

Wealthy caught at her speech.

"You can, Janet," her words hurrying themselves along her passionate voice. "Just go down stairs and tell Ralph from me, that I regret not seeing him to-night—that I surely will to-morrow."

"Oh, Wealthy, do not ask me to see—to speak to that man!" and a shudder of terror, despite herself, shook the pale face of Janet Strong.

Wealthy saw it. In a moment, the anger, and the passionate entreaty were quenched in her eyes. Her face settled into a deadly calm of fixed purpose. She walked to the door. Then she turned and said, in slow, dead-level tones :

"I shall keep my promise; but I shall go down and give my own message to John, as you refuse to take it."

Janet was at her side now. There was no more to be done.

"Go back, Wealthy; I will take it." And Wealthy went.

When Janet reached the front door, she found it locked. Outside, though, she heard angry voices.

John Bell's downright honesty prevented his being a good actor at any time. In this instance, he had hardly tried to be; the aversion and wrath that fired his soul could not be absolutely held back from his voice, when he delivered the message from his young mistress to her betrothed.

He delivered her words faithfully, and perhaps a stranger would not have detected anything unusual in his manner; but Ralph Brainerd did. His suspicions always had the alertness of an evil man, who had no faith in others, because he had none in himself; and there were especial reasons why they were unusually active at this time.

All his attempts to conciliate John were useless. He was inflexible, and at last, alarmed and angered, Ralph Brainerd lost his temper, and insisted that he must and would see Miss Dana that night.

John swung the door heavily to. It was fastened by a night-lock, of which he only had the key, and he planted his heavy figure in the way.

" You'll get over my dead body first," growled John Bell, under his locked teeth.

Ralph Brainerd looked at him in wrath and indecision. He was a famous wrestler, although John had five times his strength of muscle. He did not doubt but he could throw the man if he closed in with him; but there were several reasons why he disliked to have a personal encounter with Wealthy Dana's serving-man.

He knew the position which John occupied in the family, and his influence over his young mistress, and he feared that he might injure his cause and demean himself in her eyes with the first blow which he struck ; but he was bent on seeing Wealthy that night at all hazards.

As for John, his wrath got the mastery of him. His answers were certainly calculated to enrage Ralph Brainerd, each one growing more surly or defiant, and it was in the midst of the loud, angry talk betwixt the two men that Janet's voice broke :

" Open the door, John !"

He recognized it. Ralph Brainerd did not, having no suspicion that she was there, and fancying it was Wealthy who spoke now.

" I can't do it, ma'am. This is no place for you now," answered John sturdily, at the key-hole.

Ralph Brainerd pressed up closely.

" Open the door, you rascal !" he demanded, in a threatening voice, but so low that the lady inside could not hear.

" John, you can trust me. I must come out, or a worse thing will happen. Open the door," said soft and firm the voice of Janet Strong.

John hesitated a moment. He looked at Ralph Brainerd, who stood close by his side.

" Walk down there, and I'll do it," was his ultimatum, as he pointed to the lowest of the high flight of stone steps, with the air of one who was master.

The man whom he addressed looked doubtful a moment; but his desire to see Wealthy, and to learn what was at the bottom of this singular affair, overmastered any scruples which his pride or his judgment might entertain at comply-

ing with the old servant's ultimatum. Ralph Brainerd always trusted more to his personal influence over others than to anything else, and the result usually showed his wisdom.

He walked down on the lower step, thus putting it out of his power to cross the threshold. John unlocked the door, drew a lady swiftly out, whipped it to with a heavy bang, and Janet Strong stood on the steps. In the darkness the other could not see. He sprang forward, his voice full of eager tenderness, "Wealthy—"

"It is not Wealthy," said the soft, strange voice in the dark, faintly penetrated by the starlight.

He knew her tones now. He had a keen ear for voices:

"Miss Strong, is it you?"

In his amazement and disappointment he forgot to offer her his hand. This night Ralph Brainerd was not just himself.

"My friend requests me to give you her regrets that she cannot see you this evening, but she will to-morrow."

"But there are reasons that make an interview absolutely imperative this evening. What is the cause of her refusal?" now doubly alarmed at seeing her guest.

"You shall know all to-morrow—when Mr. Humphreys is here."

The words only increased his vague alarm. Certainly any affianced lover would have had reason to complain of such treatment from his betrothed.

"Are you quite alone with her?" asked Mr. Brainerd.

"Yes; quite alone;" not knowing whether it was wisest to tell him the truth; but she was not used to prevarication.

"Miss Strong," with the old insinuating voice and manner, "will you be kind enough to take a message from me to Miss Dana?"

"I had rather you would not intrust me with it. Wait until to-morrow," answered Janet, hardly knowing what she said.

Then Ralph Brainerd knew at once that whatever evil stood betwixt him and Wealthy, this girl was in some sense at the bottom of it. He drew close to Janet Strong, and laid his hand on her shoulder, and said, in a low, determined voice, while the fiend which was in him, glared for a moment out of the eyes of Ralph Brainerd:

"I must and will see Wealthy Dana this night, no matter what plots you or this man may have laid to prevent it!"

There certainly was a threat in the man's voice. He had lost his self-possession. Of a certainty, for that one night, the devil did not help Ralph Brainerd.

"Take your hands off that lady, sir," blazed up John Bell, at this moment.

"Oh, John, don't—don't," pleaded Janet, for blows always lay beyond words of that kind.

"You and she are leagued against me. Take that for your insolence," said Ralph Brainerd, and he dealt a blow with his left hand—a blow that fell where he did not intend it. For Janet Strong stood betwixt him and John Bell. There was a faint shriek. Janet reeled and fell off the steps, striking her forehead on their sharp edge, making a long, ugly black bruise; had it been an inch nearer her temples, it must have killed her.

Whatever were Ralph Brainerd's evil deeds, striking women was certainly not among them. He took delight sometimes in the refinements of cruelty; he might possibly in certain moods enjoy seeing his victim writhe helplessly in his power; but he did not relish disorder and violence. He could have cursed himself the next moment, that his rage had leaped out and fallen on Janet. And then it gave his enemy an immense advantage over him, for John Bell did not wait longer.

The strife betwixt the two men was short, but it seemed to Janet, as she lay there in a half conscious state, and listened to the heavy thud of the blows, that it was deadly on both sides. Under ordinary circumstances, John Bell's great muscular strength would have been no match for the skill of his well-trained antagonist, but that night it seemed as though eye and arm had failed Ralph Brainerd. He did, at first, well-nigh succeed in throwing his heavy opponent; but John just escaped this fate, and the blows from that heavy fist were like those from a sledge-hammer. Ralph Brainerd had the full force of several of these; he staggered under them.

As John afterward expressed himself with a low, triumphant chuckle, "the fight was pretty well taken out of him for that night;" he saw that he must make an ignoble retreat, or that he would suffer a sound beating at the hands of his

opponent, and it was not a pleasant prospect, after the few admonitions which he had received from John's fists, and of which he would be likely to have frequent reminders for several days to come.

There was evidently no use in trying to force his way into the house; he glanced at the prostrate figure on the grass, muttered a fearful anathema, and walked off with a somewhat unsteady step to the hotel. As soon as he was outside the gate, John picked up Janet:

"Has he killed you?" was his first question.

"Oh, no, John. You must help me into the house, though. What have you done to him?"

"Given him about a tenth part of as sound a drubbing as I wanted to. I reckon we won't be troubled with him any more to-night."

"Wealthy must know nothing of all this. If she believed he had suffered any injury at your hands, she would go to him at once."

John saw the truth of this. He opened the door softly, and set Janet inside. She insisted that she must go at once to Wealthy, and John, although he disliked to have her mount the stairs alone, was glad to escape seeing his mistress until he should recover from his strong excitement.

It was hardly five minutes since Janet had left the room, when she returned; they seemed like so many hours to Wealthy. She was pacing the floor with her white, agitated face. She turned greedily toward Janet as she opened the door:

"Have you seen him?"

"Yes, Wealthy, and told him what you said."

"And what did he reply?"

"At first he insisted upon seeing you; but—but, afterward he went away."

Then Wealthy Dana sat down, and burst into a storm of miserable, passionate sobs, and betwixt them she hurled the bitter, pent-up anger of the day at Janet:

"See what you have done, Janet Strong! You have come betwixt me and the man whom I love, and who loves me, and made me the most wretched of women. You have sent him away from me, doubting my heart, and perhaps he will never come back," wringing her hands and half beside her-

self as this thought suggested itself. "Oh, Janet Strong, from this hour I shall hate you."

"Wealthy!" the name died in a little faint gasp. Janet reached her hands out blindly, and the next moment came down with a sharp sound on the floor.

Wealthy sprang toward her. She caught sight of the long, dark bruise on Janet's forehead, and above that, the blood was oozing out from the torn skin. The sight created a great revulsion in Wealthy's feelings, or rather brought her to her senses, for she had been half frenzied before.

"Oh, Janet—Janet, have I killed you?" she shrieked, trying to lift up the deadly-pale face. "What have I said?"

At that moment John knocked at the door, and on opening it, caught sight of his mistress kneeling by the prostrate form of her guest.

"Oh, John, what does it mean? Janet, do look up, do speak, do forgive me!" cried Wealthy.

John lifted up the small form and laid it on the lounge, catching sight of the bruised cheek now.

"Poor little thing!" he muttered. "I thought he'd hurt her worse than she'd own up to. That man's the devil, Miss Wealthy!" turning wrathfully on his mistress, and forgetting all need of caution.

"Whom do you mean, John?" staring at him out of her bright bewildered eyes, in a great doubt and anguish.

"I mean Ralph Brainerd."

"What has he done?" she gasped.

"Done! Why he jist knocked her off the steps, after she give him your message, and came pretty near costing her life. I reckon that's about enough for one night!"

Wealthy Dana crept up to Janet's side, and laid her cheek down on the bruised cheek of her friend. "I wish I could die, oh, I wish I could die!" she said.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE morning train did not bring Guy Humphreys, neither did Mr. Brainerd present himself at the house, which was somewhat remarkable, as the bruises which he had received could not have been of a sufficiently serious character to keep him in-doors.

As for Wealthy, a great revulsion had taken place in her feelings toward Janet. That limp, unconscious figure had brought back all her old tenderness. She would not have left Janet's bedside that night had she been able to sit up; but John at last took her forcibly in his arms and carried her to her own room, and the chambermaid slept in the same apartment with Janet, who needed rest and quiet more than anything else, after she was restored to consciousness.

The sight of that bruised face affected Wealthy with a shuddering horror. A vague doubt or dread of Ralph Brainerd took possession of her.

She questioned John about all which had transpired on the steps, hanging greedily upon every word, and interrupting the narrative every moment with her swift, imperious questions.

John related every word, but when he described the encounter betwixt himself and Ralph Brainerd, as a "little tussle in which neither party did any damage, and only drove the breath out of the other," it is very doubtful whether the gentleman would not have considerably intensified this extremely mild statement of the facts.

Wealthy made no remarks at the conclusion, but the passion of her manner was all gone out of the pale, still face; while her large brown eyes held something in them, of doubt and anguish, which it hurt one to see. Yet if the blow was to fall at its heaviest, it would not strike at the roots of Wealthy Dana's life. Her affection for Ralph Brainerd had been of too sudden development; it owed too much to his own personal magnetism, and too much to Wealthy's fancies and tastes, to draw upon any vital forces of her life or love.

It was vehement and demonstrative—at least as much so as was possible to one of Wealthy Dana's nature; but the tributaries which fed the stream had, after all, no deep perennial sources. Ralph Brainerd had dazzled and charmed her; so has many a man, many a woman, older and wiser than she. A circumstance transpired that day which John laid away in his memory and did not repeat to his mistress until months afterward.

The old clergyman who had married and buried Miss Dana's father and mother, rode up to the door about twilight. John saw him, and to him he delivered the message which his mistress had given him for all callers—"She was too ill to see any one that day."

The face of the old man under its silver-gray hairs fell into a sudden gravity.

"I am extremely sorry to hear that. Mr. Brainerd called on me last evening on his way up from the depot, and requested my attendance here at this time, saying that he expected to have a brief, but to him very important rite celebrated at this hour. His manner left me no doubt that it was his marriage with Miss Dana to which he alluded."

"He meant to be in a hurry, the rascal!" thought John.

Mr. Stebbins was a faithful friend of the family, and for a moment an impulse seized John to confide to him the jeopardy worse than death in which his young mistress was placed. But John carried the fine instincts of a true and generous soul beneath that rough, stolid front of his. He only informed the clergyman that no wedding rites would be celebrated under the roof that day, and the old pastor took his usual stately leave, in a somewhat perplexed and mystified frame of mind.

If it had not been for Janet Strong, Ralph Brainerd and Wealthy Dana would have been wedded husband and wife before the next train came in!

At last Janet heard the shrill shriek of the distant train, as she lay in the bed which she had not left that day.

Fifteen minutes later the bell gave a peal, which seemed to carry life or death in it. Hasty feet tramped up the stairs, the sitting-room door was thrown hastily open, and Mr. Winchester entered.

Wealthy sat there alone. Some presentiment of coming evil held her to her chair. She turned toward her uncle and cousin, but she could not speak. The words swelled and,

died in her throat—a cold, sick shudder went from head to foot. The gentlemen rushed forward.

"You are not married, Wealthy?" they cried, simultaneously.

"No—oh, uncle—Guy, what does it mean?" implored the poor girl.

"Thank God, thank God!" they both cried, and her uncle in his ecstasy of relief seized her in his arms, and covered her face with kisses of joy. It was so unlike him.

"Where is Brainerd?—where is Janet?" asked Guy Humphreys, glancing about the room.

"Janet is ill in her chamber. Ralph Brainerd has not been here to-day."

The gentlemen exchanged significant glances.

"Got wind of the facts, eh, Guy?" said the elder one.

"Quite likely."

Then Mr. Humphreys looked at his cousin pitiful, and yet exultant.

"What is it? Tell me the worst, Guy," she cried, shivering from head to foot.

"Can you bear it, my poor child?"

"Yes, for I have heard Janet's story."

"Father, you tell her," said Guy, evidently finding the task too heavy a one for him.

And Mr. Winchester took his niece in his arms and hid the pale face on his shoulder, and told her the new infamy, which had come to light the day before, of the man to whom she was betrothed. It was briefly this. Ralph Brainerd was fastidious in his tastes, self-indulgent, and extravagant. Naturally indolent, too, he had exhausted his means, which were always limited. He had fallen into debt, he was annoyed by creditors, which was especially obnoxious to a man like himself. There was a large commercial firm with whose partners he had intimate social relations, and for whom he had conducted some litigations when abroad. He had several times accompanied the youngest partner to the bank where the book of the firm was deposited. One day he went alone. He was known to all the officers of the bank. He wished to consult the book a moment, at the desire, as he affirmed, of his friend. It was handed to him without a suspicion. He subtracted five thousand dollars, and altered the figures to correspond with the amount withdrawn. This was several weeks ago. There was no probability that the

crime would have been discovered for several more; but it was, by the merest accident.

This was the first time Ralph Brainerd had infringed the letter of the law. There was no shadow of doubt but, as Wealthy Dana's husband, he could have obtained sufficient control of her fortune to restore the amount withdrawn, before the detection of his crime. And this, no doubt, among many other motives, had induced him to hasten, with all the arts of which he was master, the consummation of their marriage.

Mr. Winchester had learned the tidings the day previous, and had hastened to Dayton, hoping to be in time to prevent the nuptials, in a frame of mind that may possibly be imagined, and he had intersected his son-in-law at one of the junctions on the route. Each had a story to tell that made the faces of these strong men pale.

"My poor little girl!" said her uncle, "I am sorry for you from the bottom of my heart. It is a terrible blow, I know. But try and think of all from which you have been delivered."

And Wealthy did not answer. She kept the shame and anguish of her face hidden on the kindly shoulder of her uncle, and wishing that she need never lift it again in this world.

"Yes, try and think of *that*, Wealthy," said Guy, walking up and down the room. "I never shall forgive myself for introducing him to you under my roof. But who could have suspected the fellow was such a 'cut and dried' villain? My confidence in my own judgment has had a terrible shaking."

"So has mine," said his father-in-law. "In the course of my life I have been brought in contact with all sorts of men, but I must say that Ralph Brainerd is the most successful villain that ever crossed my path."

At that moment the door opened.

"Janet, Janet!" cried Guy Humphreys, hurrying forward. He stood still the next moment, with a shocked face, as he caught the black-blue bruise on her cheek. "Why, what has happened to you?"

Then Wealthy sprang up from her uncle's arms and rushed forward.

"Oh, Janet, Janet, you have saved me!"

A passion of grief and gratitude thrilled along her voice,

and Wealthy Dana lay in a dead faint at the feet of Janet Strong.

And that very hour Ralph Brainerd was on his way to Europe, a disappointed, desperate man, fleeing his country. The burden of his crime had lain heavily for weeks—not on his conscience, but on his fears. It was a new and anything but an agreeable feeling to know that if his crime was discovered he would be a branded felon. His fears got in some sense the mastery of even his cool judgment.

The singular refusal of his betrothed to see him on the eve of their marriage, and his encounter with John, in which he was decidedly worsted, did not tend to reassure him. He returned to the hotel, passed a sleepless night, contemplating every possible reason except the right one for Wealthy's behavior, and at last working himself into a fear, that to any unimpassioned judge acquainted with all the circumstances would have seemed most improbable, that his crime had come to light. Before dawn his resolve was taken. It was best to know the worst, in order to provide against it.

Somewhat stiff and sore he took the early train for New York. He reached the city, and learned—no matter by what means—of the discovery of his crime. A steamer for Europe lay at the wharf ready to start. Two hours later he was on his way.

Surely in some sense Margaret Ritter had been avenged.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

FOUR summers more have slipped away. The September day, in all its still, luscious beauty of sky and earth, smiles down on the Hudson. And down the path of the noble old river a steamer is making its way, freighted with passengers who are returning from their summer trips, now the season is over—fashionable people, a large part of them, who have spent their money and dissipated their time at Saratoga and Lake George, and come back neither better nor wiser than they went. But there are others who bring a new life into the old; who have found in forest, and mountain, and river, the new evangel of beauty which all eyes may read; who bring with them the power of seeing, and who have heard the old eternal harmonies with which wind and wave have gone harping through the earth, since the morning stars sang over it for joy.

A large part of the passengers are on deck enjoying the fresh breeze and the marvelous beauty of the banks on either side; and there has just been an addition to these in three persons—a gentleman and lady, with a little girl two or three years this side of her teens.

That quiet air of good breeding, which always seems to assert itself unconsciously in a crowd, is about all these people. The gentleman has a linen coat thrown over one arm; the lady wears a dark brown traveling-dress. She throws her veil aside with a quick movement, as the gentleman pioneers her and the little girl, who has grasped her hand, to the side of the boat; and—these four years have dealt gently with Janet Strong—you have no need for a second glance to identify her. A little more womanly the face has grown certainly, but it has lost none of its rare charm of sweetness, and the cheeks hold the faint bloom of their girlhood still; the blue eyes are alive now, feeding on the beautiful scenery of river and mountain; the lips are

parted with a smile of still, intense enjoyment. The gentleman watches her face quietly, evidently enjoying that quite as much as the scenery. She turns to him at last.

"What a noble river it is!" she says. "And then I have my birthright's pride in it. To think of all the old traditions and Revolutionary interests that cluster along these banks—our dear old historical Hudson!"

And here the young girl's voice breaks in, eager and a little peremptory:

"I shall be able to talk with you all about it, Uncle Guy, before we travel here again, for Miss Janet says we shall read Irving's Life of Washington next winter."

"Capital reading for winter evenings," says Mr. Humphreys, and then he searches around in quest of chairs, as these have been pretty closely appropriated by the passengers, and he makes some remark at which Janet laughs, that little, quick, leaping laugh of hers, which has a certain individuality of its own.

It reaches the ears of a couple of travelers not far off, who have been among the Adirondacks for a month, and are returning now, having left the rest of their party to follow some days later. Both of the travelers are sunburnt, as all hearty excursionists are certain to be; but there is a great physical dissimilitude betwixt them. The elder is a gentleman—and I mean this in its highest and finest sense—always and anywhere a gentleman, by the gift of God. For the other, he has a square, sturdy figure, in harmony with his face, with its broad, homely features, lacking in nowise, however, shrewdness and character. His beard evidently receives a good deal of care, though the wearer thereof is the farthest possible degree removed from a fop—a good, sturdy, honest face, whose homeliness wears well as you get acquainted with it.

There is more than half a score of years betwixt the two travelers, though looking at them both as they stand there, you would not fancy the gap betwixt their ages so wide.

Both of the men wear traveling suits, the elder of somewhat finer texture than his companion's. Both of them caught Janet's laugh. For different reasons it flashed across some chord of memory in both, and both turned and looked at her. In a moment a change came over the face of the younger man. It paled and glowed quickly; he fairly held his breath, hungrily piercing with his gray eyes

the face of Janet Strong; then he sprang forward as though impelled beyond his own volition:

"Oh, ma'am, how do you do?" as a man might say it to the friend on earth he was most glad to see.

Janet looked up in blank amazement. His face had something familiar in it that grew on her while she gazed, and yet she could not identify it.

"Don't you know me?" he asked.

"No; but I have seen you somewhere."

"That's a fact, ma'am. If you've forgotten me, you haven't Mark Ritter!"

In a flash it all came back to Janet. She put out her hand now.

"Oh, Mark, I'm glad to see you!" she said.

"Not so glad as I am to see you, ma'am," taking the hand in his honest joy in both of his strong ones, while the heavy features were in a light and quiver of emotion.

"I always have had an inward conviction that you were doing well, Mark, and that some time you would come to tell me of it."

"You were right, ma'am; I've had it in my mind for years to call on you, but it was awkward, when I didn't so much as know your name."

Mark Ritter had quite outgrown the raw country youth of four years ago. His language, his accent, his whole manner, were vastly improved.

"I had forgotten that," answered the lady, introducing herself with a little smile—"Miss Janet Strong."

And then she turned and presented her companions. Mark Ritter was shrewd enough to detect under all the quiet courtesy of Mr. Humphreys' manner that the gentleman had heard of him before, while Maude stared with wide-mouthed curiosity, first at Janet and then at her strange friend.

"I see some unoccupied chairs," glancing toward those at a distance which a party had just vacated. "Our friends will excuse us for a little while if I leave them to talk with you."

It was like Janet Strong to say this. She was singularly free from all affectations, and any sudden feeling always brought to the surface the natural ingenuousness of her character. Something of the dew and freshness of childhood lingered about her, and always would. Mr. Humphreys looked amused, but he answered promptly:

"Certainly we will excuse her, if she promises not to be absent too long; won't we, Maude?" and then he watched with a good deal of interest the small figure which followed Mark to the other end of the steamer, and he said half to himself, half to his niece—"She isn't just like any other woman in the world, is she?"

And as he turned away, Mr. Humphreys encountered the eyes of the gentleman with whom Mark had been conversing previous to his recognition of Janet. The stranger, standing so close at hand, and quite unobserved—for even Mark in his surprise and delight had lost all consciousness of the presence of his companion—had evidently overheard the conversation, as well as Mr. Humphreys' closing remark. There was a mutual consciousness in their eyes which opened a clear road into speech.

"There is evidently some mystery to be unraveled here," said the strange gentleman, folding his paper, and addressing Mr. Humphreys.

"Yes, and I fancy, sir, that I have the clew to it all, although it is of a nature which I am not at liberty to reveal. You know this young man, sir. If you please, I should like some information about him?"

"He is a clerk in our house, and has been there four years. He holds now a position of considerable trust; honest and faithful to the core, with great shrewdness and sagacity, which one at first would hardly suspect, for he does not carry his best self on the outside."

After this satisfactory character of the clerk, each gentleman introduced himself to the other. Mr. Humphreys at once recognized the commercial house of which this gentleman was youngest partner, one of the oldest and most responsible in the city. They had many mutual acquaintances too.

So they fell at once into a pleasant conversation, which soon drifted off to the Adirondacks, from which the gentleman was returning, and amid which Mr. Humphreys had encamped for six weeks the previous summer.

Mark Ritter, with his varied ingenuity, and knowledge of country life, had been of vast service to the party in its bivouac in the wilderness, the gentleman affirmed; and he was in the midst of some adventures, which proved the resources of his young clerk in any sudden danger or exigency, when Mrs. Humphreys presented herself on deck, and was introduced to Guy's new acquaintance.

"I fancied," said Mrs. Humphreys, as she took the seat her husband offered her, and it would have been difficult for a stranger to decide from her tones whether she was vexed or amused, and probably the lady herself would have found it equally difficult to analyze her own feelings, "I fancied that I might just as well make my way on deck alone, if I wanted to see anything, as it would not probably recur to your mind that you had a wife who would be glad of any small attentions, before the boat touched the wharf; you were in such charming company—why, where is Miss Janet?" suddenly alive to the fact of her absence.

Here Maude broke in:

"Oh, Aunt Evelyn, such a strange thing as has just happened! A young man by the name of Mark Ritter has found Miss Janet, and"—

"Mark Ritter!" exclaimed Mrs. Humphreys, with an explosive start. "Isn't he the one, Guy, who—" Her husband's glance checked the lady's volubility of speech in full tide.

"But are you certain, Guy? Is it really he? I am so amazed!"

"It is really he! Try and keep cool, my dear."

This was evidently quite out of the range of Mrs. Humphreys' possibilities. She was in a flutter of curiosity and amazement, and made her husband relate minutely all the circumstances of the meeting betwixt Janet and Mark Ritter; interspersing the relation with all kinds of extravagant, and mysterious expletives, so that the curiosity of the gentleman who sat near, grave and quiet, listening to all this, must have been more or less stimulated, according to the interest which he took in the matter.

Mrs. Humphreys' personal charms had not improved during the last four years; her husband thought her disposition had not, although this he would not have admitted to any one but himself, and possibly one other person beside.

Mrs. Humphreys' beauty was of that apple-blossom kind which time or sickness wilts so rapidly. Hers certainly had not perished, but it had paled visibly. Her health had had some sharp strains during these years. For a few weeks the new joy of maternity had been given to her, and then—there was a little grave-roof built in one corner of the new burial lot at Woodleaf, and under it lay the first-born of Guy and Evelyn Humphreys.

The proud young mother did not know how to take her first sorrow. She thought no grief had ever been so heavy as hers, and nothing in all her previous living had fitted her to bear it. Guy loved his young wife tenderly, and did all that was in his power to comfort and soothe her.

But it seemed as though for a time Evelyn was indifferent to all other love, now that her baby was gone. She made too much a luxury and a selfishness of her grief, and was only at times the bright, merry, fascinating Evelyn Humphreys of old. All this was natural enough. Sunshine alone will not mellow the juices of any character.

Mark Ritter and Janet had no idea it was so long, but it was nearly an hour before they returned to the party which they had left so informally. The youth had complied with Janet's first question as they seated themselves:

"And now, Mark, I want to hear all that has happened to you during these years?"

He had told his story, a happy one, in which Janet thought she could see God's guiding hand, which we sometimes lose sight of in the dark passes of life. He had come to the city after leaving Woodleaf, alone, friendless, and with very little means, to seek for employment. One day, walking along the streets, seeking for anything that might "turn up," he saw a young boy mounted on top of a light wagon vainly attempting to manage an obstinate animal, who had discovered that the reins were not in the hands of his master. Mark was equal to anything in that line. He was fresh from the country, too, and stepped forward at once and offered his services, which were promptly accepted.

Mark drove the boy down to the wharf, and then as the latter seemed grateful, he made known his quest for employment.

Marcus Drew—that was the boy's name—insisted on Mark's accompanying him to the house in which he was errand boy. One of the porters had left that morning, and Marcus had attempted to supply his place. He conveyed Mark at once to the youngest partner of the house, who listened to his story and seemed to take a kindly interest in him, especially after he learned that he was homeless and friendless in the world.

So Mark was duly installed in the missing porter's place. He had not remained there a great while, he told Janet, with very pardonable pride. He had mounted a good many

rounds of the ladder since that time, and Mr. Bryant Whitney had always been his counselor and friend. Two years before—his voice fell here—he had visited the old home in Vermont, and now there was a couple of neat head-stones at the mother's grave and Maggie's, and every May the rose-vines he had transplanted from the little cottage, made a fire of bloom there.

Janet's voice struggled with her tears awhile before she could answer Mark; at last it mastered the words:

"How glad I am to hear all this from you, Mark! How good God has been to you!"

"Very good, ma'am; and may I tell you, Miss Strong, that there has not been a night since that one, that I have not prayed for blessing and happiness on your head. It was you that saved me from a terrible sin once. I've lived to see that now."

And here again Janet Strong had "lived for something!"

After awhile Mark inquired if she knew anything of—him?

Janet hesitated a moment before she replied. She did not like to confide her friend's story to another, but she felt it was due to Mark that he should know how Ralph Brainard's wrong to his sister had wrought out shame and dishonor in this world, which it does not always do for the wicked.

She told him how this man had been betrothed to her dearest friend, a noble and lovely girl, and how, at the last moment, remembering Mark Ritter's story, Janet had succeeded in rescuing her friend from a marriage which would have been worse than death, and how Ralph Brainard had had at last to fly from his native land, in disguise and dishonor.

Mark Ritter's eyes blazed for awhile with fierce joy, as he drank greedily in every word. The fires of his youth must burn low before the thought of Maggie's betrayer would not arouse the old wrath in his soul, but he would never again seek to take God's vengeance into his own hands.

Perhaps Janet Strong had never looked prettier in her life, than she did when she returned with Mark to her friends. Those blue eyes were fairly radiant, those sweet lips were tremulous with happy thoughts, and her cheeks were stained with a deeper flush than they usually carried.

"Why, Janet, how happy you look!" was Mrs. Hum-

phreys' salutation, for the lady had been on the *qui vive* for her return during the last half hour.

"I am," bringing the full light of her eyes on Evelyn, and then she turned, in her quiet, simple fashion, which with her was no acquired art, and presented "her friend, Mark Ritter."

He was received in a manner that might have flattered that young man, had he not possessed acuteness enough to perceive that the cordiality had its root partly in sympathy, partly in kindly curiosity.

And then Mark presented Mr. Whitney to Janet; and they all fell into a friendly and informal talk, which was not interrupted until an hour later, when the boat reached the wharf.

Mr. Humphreys coupled with his adiens to Mr. Whitney a cordial request that he would visit him during their brief sojourn in town, and the gentleman promised to do himself the pleasure of calling, provided Mr. Humphreys would bring the ladies out to his residence before he left the city, which the latter agreed to do.

"It seems to me," thought Bryant Whitney, standing on the pier, and gazing abstractedly after the receding carriage, "that Trot, little Trot, would have made a woman somewhat like her. There is something in her face—in the very turn of her head, the trill of her voice, and the flutter of her laugh, that is like—our baby's."

Mark Ritter touched his arm—the carriage had disappeared now—with some question about the baggage.

"That lady seems to be an old friend of yours?" said the master, making a very irrelevant reply to his clerk.

"This is the third time that I ever saw her, sir."

"Indeed! I should not have suspected that from your meeting."

The remark solicited further information.

Bryant Whitney was the last man to persuade the confidence of another, but this time there was some trace of curious interest in his voice.

Mark looked up in the grave, strong, manly face, so kindly withal. It drew his next words out.

"Mr. Whitney, I owe that woman—that angel, I had better say—more than anybody in this world. She saved me once from a deed which mankind would call—murder!"

"Mark!"

That was all Mr. Whitney said. That sturdy, honest face had no sanguinary look in it.

"It's a fact, sir; I'd tell you the whole story, only—this isn't the place for it."

"Come up to my house and dine to-night, and afterward—tell me what you like," said Bryant Whitney.

So it was arranged, and the two parted. That evening, in the library, where we first met Bryant Whitney, Mark Ritter told the story of his life.

What do you suppose that tale of Margaret Ritter's wrong was to this pure-hearted, noble, and tender-souled man, who, having no ties of wife or sister, held in such tender reverence all womanhood; whose thought of her always had in it some element of manly homage, and who invested her gentleness and weakness with an almost ideal grace and beauty?

With the anger of a righteous man did his soul loathe the soul of Ralph Brainerd, whom he remembered meeting briefly once or twice. How could he blame Mark Ritter for seeking this man's life, when he thought of his own young sister, until at last, upon all the foul wrong, the deadly grief, the fearful vengeance, rose at last pure, and tender, and holy, less woman than angel, the image of Janet Strong?

From the hour that he first met her in the woods, until that last one in the grove, when, with tears streaming over her fair white cheeks, she besought Mark Ritter in the name of the dead, "not to do this murder"—from that hour to this, did the grateful youth whom she had saved carry Bryant Whitney.

He remembered every word she had spoken, almost every inflection of her voice; it was like living over that time again to hear Mark Ritter's story. Certainly Janet Strong never regarded herself in any such coloring as she was drawn that night.

And when these two parted, there was a new tie of confidence and sympathy given, and held in sorest need, betwixt master and clerk.

"I must see that woman again," said Bryant Whitney to himself, as he sat long and late in his library that night. And he said it as he never before had of any woman.

## CHAPTER XXV.

WEALTHY DANA was loyal in her friendships. She had a pretty quaint fancy of individualizing whomsoever especially belonged by herself. So she had christened Janet "Natalie," because the soft, gliding vowels happened to strike her fancy.

Deeper than all this, she had the gratitude of a generous and noble nature. She never forgot what Janet had once done for her—what she owed to her.

She had recuperated with wonderful rapidity from the blow which Ralph Brainerd's villainy had first struck her. In a little while, it all became to her a feverish dream, on which she looked back with loathing and terror.

But in more ways than one, that shock had done her good. It had in some sense humbled her. Her faith in herself was less imperious; she was tenderer, more pitiful, as all loss and trial should make us.

As I said, for Janet, her gratitude knew no bounds. There was no doubt she would have been Ralph Brainerd's wife, if her friend had not come to her rescue as she had. A few hours must have been fatal. He would, by some plausible sophistry, have persuaded her into the consummation of the marriage, before the arrival of her uncle and cousin, had not Janet been there to thwart him.

All this Wealthy Dana thought over by day and by night in her shuddering soul. She remembered, too, every word that in her frantic pride and passion, she had hurled against Janet. For every one she had entreated forgiveness, in a way that must have won it fully and absolutely from the heart of any friend.

During these years, however, the two had not met frequently. There seemed, Wealthy declared, a kind of fatality, which interposed and frustrated all their plans. For two winters Miss Dana had accompanied to Cuba an old and very dear friend of her mother's, who was an invalid and childless, and greatly attached to her.

And in one way and another, the interviews of the young girls had always been brief, and abruptly terminated by some circumstance over which neither had control.

Twice Wealthy had visited Woodleaf. Janet was perfectly aware that in doing this the former had made a great sacrifice to her affection, and that had it not been for her friend's sake, she would never have crossed the threshold, full of painful memories, and associations as it must be to her.

Not that the faintest regret for Ralph Brainerd lingered in the heart of this girl. Once convinced beyond a question of the utter unworthiness of the man whom she had loved, and Wealthy Dana was of too sound and healthful a nature, not to absolutely relinquish all thought and feeling for him. She remembered him now only with horror and loathing, and yet to any high-spirited, pure-hearted woman, the thought that she had ever entertained any abiding sentiment for an evil man, must come home with a pang of humiliation, although her own innocence and purity may have been the very causes of her deception.

Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys, with Janet and Maude, had been on a little journey to Saratoga and Lake George, and it was on their return to New York that the unexpected meeting with Mark Ritter had transpired.

The family had also engaged to pass a week or two in the city before returning to Woodleaf, that having now become the permanent residence of the family; its former occupant, the uncle of Mr. Humphreys, had died suddenly while abroad, leaving his nephew heir of his estate.

Janet's emotions had hardly relapsed to their natural tone before a letter from Miss Dana reached her. The friends corresponded promptly, and Wealthy was now at the White Mountains, with a small party of friends, and had promised to be at Woodleaf in the early autumn, Janet not having seen her for a year.

Wealthy's whole letter concentrated itself for Janet in a few lines near the close.

"Natalie, my best friend and deepest-tried," she wrote, "my pen has made a long pause here. I have been sorely tempted to close my letter and withhold the secret which it is very sweet to reflect is only mine in all the world; and yet the memory of all which I owe to you, the past salvation, the present happiness—oh, Natalie, it is your right to know, it is my duty to tell."

"For more than three months I have suspected, what I know now, although no words on his part have yet told me so, that a certain friend of mine held me in his thought and hope as more than this.

"We have been much together during our tour in Canada, and he is stopping in the same village with us here.

"I confess to you, my Natalie, that I liked him beyond any man whom I ever met, until that evil shadow darkened over my life.

"I cannot write more of it. You know the woman that I am, and that my words mean somewhat beyond themselves. He is a good man, a noble, a true one. Forgive me, Natalie, as I never will myself, that I once said it of that other. He is a lawyer, a few years my senior, standing already high in his profession, fulfilling with honor and fidelity all his relations with all men; and, Natalie, what am I, that I should be worthy of him?

"His name—it is possible you may have heard them speak it; although doubtless it has quite slipped out of your memory—his name is *Robert Crandall!*"

The letter closed here. It dropped out of Janet's hands as she sat alone in her chamber in the banker's stately home, and Janet's head dropped on the table.

I do not know whether Janet Strong, during these last years, ever put the question to her own heart, whether she was happy. She was not much given to morbid introversion, and was naturally of a sweet-tempered, cheerful habit. But of course the old glamour and "*couleur de rose*," which at first surrounded her life at Woodleaf, had vanished. Its grace and luxury were familiar things now. She could not understand that she had ever lived without them. The old life had become a dream. And yet, as the years went on, some vague sense of hunger and discontent took possession of her.

She was faithful to her studies: her reflective powers, her intellect deepened and expanded day by day; but beneath these lay a nature most womanly, without tie of home or kindred, a nature that must arouse itself sometimes with a sense of loss and want.

Then, too, her life was not without its annoyances and *every-day trials*, smoothly as its first currents had run.

Daily contact with anybody is apt to develop their peculiarities and angles of character. It was certainly remarkable that Janet and her patrons got on together for so long a time as well as they did; remarkable, too, that Mrs. Humphreys' first pretty fancy for Janet had survived through all these years.

Still, the little wife had been a spoiled child from the beginning, and when her health failed in some degree, she lost her exuberant spirits, and grew unequal, exacting, and unconsciously selfish.

Janet was the recipient of all her little marital troubles, and fancied trials. They frequently worried and exhausted the young girl's feelings, as well as her time; and then, how pitifully small they looked to Janet, whose youth had carried such heavy burdens all alone!

Sometimes, when the weariness and despondency articulated itself strongest, a keen hunger for change would take possession of Janet.

She would half resolve on leaving Woodleaf, and going out once more to "seek her own fortunes—get a situation in some school, for instance; she was fitted for that now."

But the cable was woven of too many, and too fine fibers, that anchored her where she was. Would she ever find a home on the whole so pleasant, with duties so light?

Could she leave the little pupil, who loved her so ardently, and to whom she was so warmly attached? And then, what would Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys say? It would be base ingratitude to leave the friends to whom she owed in some sense all that she now was.

Then for Mr. Humphreys—many a wife would certainly have been jealous of the marked regard which he always manifested for his niece's governess.

Evelyn was always jesting, and sometimes, there was no doubt, pouting over it. That she never was seriously disturbed, was proved from the fact that she was always bringing the young lady and her husband together, and if the fancy had seized her, would have gone off visiting for months, and left the two solely to each other's society.

Still, she considered herself the most injured of mortals, if her husband failed in any of the graceful attentions of their early wedded life, and his default here was a source of never-ending complaint to Janet, although the shadow of a suspicion did not seem to cross the little lady's mind that

she had the least effort to make to retain her husband's devotion, in all its early grace and fervor.

So the domestic atmosphere was frequently clouded, and there were petty discords, and unkind sarcasms, and little recriminations. Had Janet been less conscientiously the friend of both, had she been less judicious, had she not kept sentinels at the gates where vanity, and love of admiration ever lay in wait, there would have been greater troubles than these. Guy Humphreys and his wife did not suspect how many difficulties she smoothed away, how many little rising clouds of peevishness and anger disappeared before her cheerful smile, her pleasant tones; how she was always turning the bright side of every speech and act toward them. For Guy had his share of the blame, too. He ought to have known that the bewitching child, with her bright spirits, and buoyant health, that he had taken to wife, could not go through life as he had wedded her, nor develop into the serene, noble, and gracious womanhood, which his mature manhood craved. He was not infrequently careless and irritable himself, having been always accustomed to his own way quite as much as Evelyn; so the fair and stately home at Woodleaf had its skeleton too.

As for society, it always had its high tides there in the summer. A young girl like Janet could not fail to attract the attention of the gentlemen who met her. But the best of Guy's classmates were married men now, and for the perfumed and fashionable gentlemen whom she met at Woodleaf or elsewhere, Janet turned from them with simple disgust.

It was very much so in the little summer trips which she took, and which were full of interest and novelty to Janet for a few days, although she very soon wearied of fashionable watering-places, not being of material to enjoy them. But a trip to the White Mountains, a journey on the lakes, were different matters; and then each winter Mrs. Humphreys went several times to New York, and always insisted on Janet's accompanying her once, and so she had for a few weeks a glimpse of up-town life—not her first one, Janet said to herself with a little quaint smile, thinking of Mrs. Kenneth.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

JANET STRONG could not tell, as she sat in her room that morning, whether she was glad or sorry for the tidings which Wealthy's letter had brought.

The name had struck her like a blinding flash of light, when the letter and her head dropped together. Amazement mastered every other feeling with her still.

Wealthy Dana, Robert Crandall's wife! She said it over and over to herself, without realizing what the words meant. It seemed only yesterday now that she saw him, standing at the front door, with his bright, handsome face, and his dark eyes smiling down on her.

In all these years, no man had ever made the flutter and tumult in her heart which he did in her little foolish one then. And one of these days she must see him again. There was no getting aside of that, howsoever much she might desire it.

And how would he feel when he should first learn that that little girl he could not *quite* have forgotten, was the most cherished friend of his betrothed?—for Janet saw well enough where it would end. He did not suspect yet; he would not be likely to, indeed—thanks to Wealthy's fondness for pet names, and it might be some time before he learned her real one. But sooner or later, the denouement must come.

How like some strange romance it all seemed! What would Wealthy say? Above all, in some mysterious way, the faint shadow of which she saw now, “as in a glass darkly,” was God's hand in all this?

Such were Janet's thoughts during the hours which followed the reading of that letter, for Mrs. Humphreys and her mother had gone out shopping together. But deeper than all her thoughts, lay some inarticulate pain in the heart of Janet Strong. She did not analyze it. It was there, *indeed*, more or less, always now, only at times it made itself *felt* more sharply than at others, and oppressed her soul with

a vague sense of want and desolation. At such times it seemed to her that she was, among all the happy and blessed women in the world, left alone and forgotten. Her heart, her womanhood, would make its want heard, for somebody to love her, somebody to love. That sick, dreary pain, she had learned to dread, came over her this morning, and seemed fairly to stifle her.

"God help me!" prayed Janet. What else could a woman pray, in such need as hers? What if He was nearer than her weak faith saw!

At last, the ringing of the lunch-bell startled Janet up with a little cry of amazement. The morning had slipped away so rapidly.

When she descended to the dining-room, after a hasty toilet, she found the whole family at the table. Mrs. Humphreys was in one of her hilarious moods. Her mother was reprimanding the waiter for some heedlessness on his part, when the former broke in with her explanations.

"You see, Janet, we have met Mr. Whitney this morning. You remember—the gentleman we saw on the boat—and it appears that he called on us yesterday, while we were all out, and brought us an invitation to pass Thursday with him at his residence, half an hour's ride out of town, and we are all engaged to go, for he especially included you in the invitation."

"That was merely out of courtesy, Mrs. Humphreys; I should prefer to meet Mr. Whitney's wife before I visit him," answered Janet, whose interest could not easily be persuaded from the channel which now absorbed it.

"But you can't, my dear, for the simple reason that the man hasn't got any!" at which they all laughed.

"Just think of an old bachelor's keeping house in that fashion! I was myself a little in doubt about accepting the invitation, until I saw Mrs. Hastings, whose husband is a business friend of Mr. Whitney's. I mentioned the matter to her, and she said that we must not fail to go. He has a perfectly charming home, and everybody is delighted who gets an invitation out there. He has a housekeeper—some old friend of the family, I believe, who entertains his guests in place of the wife, who is not. I wonder, Guy, why Mr. Whitney never got married? There must be some reason for it. I mean to ask him about it."

"That will be presuming a little too far on your host's

good nature, my dear," gently reproved the lady's mother, who was aware that her daughter had a good deal of pretty audacity, which carried her to great lengths sometimes.

"I never saw a man that frightened me yet, mamma, from saying just what I wanted to—I shall not let Mr. Whitney."

"And you will accompany us, Miss Janet?" said Mr. Humphreys.

In her present mood the prospect of this visit did not look attractive to Janet. She cast about in her thoughts for some excuse, but none presented itself. It never occurred to her mind for a moment, that it was for her sake the unexpected invitation had been given, or that Mark Ritter had confided to his employer all the causes of his reverence and gratitude for her.

The pleasantest days of one's life are not always those whose events are the most vital, or that would be most attractive in description. This was the case certainly with the guests of Mr. Whitney that day. Nothing happened to most of them that was striking enough to relate—in a book at least, and yet it was a singularly enjoyable day to every member of the little party.

Everybody appeared to feel, as soon as they entered it, the peculiar atmosphere of Mr. Whitney's home. They seemed to nestle down in some sweet, perfect calm and rest, which left the world outside a great way off. In just what this subtle charm dwelt, nobody could tell. Indeed, one would not be apt to question; content only to be anchored in that atmosphere of perfect home peace, and calm. World-wearied men and women came here, and if they had work to do, went out with new wisdom and courage for it; and many came, too, of whom the world knew nothing: the suffering, the lonely, the forsaken, the erring, and the broken-hearted, and found under this roof, medicine for soul and body.

The house, inside and out, was something that Bryant Whitney's stylish friends would have called nothing more than "comfortable." All of them probably lived in statelier homes than this one. The quaint old English mansion was walled around on every side, and was smothered in fruit trees and shrubberies. The place was an old one, grounds and all, which even this nineteenth century had let alone, and care had well preserved. Mr. Whitney had purchased

it of the original owners, who had returned to England to occupy an estate which had fallen to them there.

The house, although it was so near the city, stood on a road which branched off from the main one, and was quite in the country, where winds, and birds, and leaves had it at their own free will.

The building occupied an imposing site, and commanded a picture from every window, some of which were wide views, sweeping the country with miles of mountain, and valley, and water, and the great city in the distance; and others framing dainty little gems of scenery, bits of green color and beauty, and swaying motion, that made one fairly hold one's breath.

Inside, the house was furnished with great simplicity. The warm, soft pearl, and maroon tones which prevailed, seemed in keeping with the place. The pictures—gems all of them, poured light, warmth, color over everything.

Mr. Whitney stood on the steps to receive his guests, when the carriage had wound up through the thick shrubberies to the house, and just inside the door stood his house-keeper, a little, faded woman, with such a kind, motherly face that it drew you to it at once. Certainly it did Janet, whom a motherly face always attracted.

This day had a peculiar individuality in keeping with everything else. It was a cool, still day, wrapped up in a soft fleece of clouds, out of which at times the sunshine seemed just ready to break, filling the sky with a kind of inward light, and then it faded softly away into the clouds again.

Janet had come this morning with a good deal of reluctance. She had not anticipated any pleasure from the visit, and would have been glad of an excuse to remain at home. Her feelings had been for the last two or three days in a tremulous, vibrative state. The slow pain that came with reading Wealthy's letter lingered always about her heart. But as soon as she entered the soothing home-calm of Mr. Whitney's house, she seemed to herself to nestle right down in it. How happy she was that day!

She went about from one room to another with such a bright, sweet content in her face; or out among the walks of the rambling plethoric old garden, with all its little surprises of ponds, and arbors, and shadowy nooks, into whose green darkness it seemed that one might retreat and

dream forever; among smooth terraces, with frills and beds of rare and choice blooms, and grand old fruit trees and vines, that held the year's ripe nectar, in plum and cluster. The small company of guests, which only included the Humphreys' family and Mrs. Winchester, bestowed itself at its own will. Everybody did at Bryant Whitney's just as they liked, and that was one great secret of the enjoyment of his guests. They never felt like company.

He never came upon Janet's face that day, never upon the small, swift figure in room or walk, but it reminded him of little Trot. It could not have been a mere fancy of his either, for Mrs. Powell, the housekeeper, remarked to him the first time they met, after the arrival of the guests:

"Did it ever strike you, Mr. Whitney, that Miss Strong was like anybody you had ever seen?"

"Yes—yes, it did," he said, a little gravely, as one is apt to speak, thinking of the lost. •

"These people are not her relatives," continued the old lady, smoothing a wrinkle in her black dress.

"I don't know, indeed. I fancied she must be a cousin of either Mr. or Mrs. Humphreys, as I believe she resides with them."

"Oh no. The little girl told me that Miss Strong was her governess."

I think, for some reason which he could not have defined, Bryant Whitney was glad to hear this. He would have been quite surprised to know how many times during the last three or four days he had puzzled himself respecting the relation which Janet occupied in Mr. Humphreys' family, for of course Mark Ritter knew nothing of this.

Did the man's very unusual interest in the young lady arise out of her resemblance to his little sister, or because of what Mark Ritter had told him? •

And now Janet began to feel a new interest and regard for her host. Everybody did who entered the charmed atmosphere of his home. The grave, kindly face, the smile in the keen, but gentle gray eyes, when they rested on hers, touched her somehow, and she found herself speculating about what manner of man he was, and what made him live there in that quaint, shadowy old house, all alone, without ties of family or kindred.

They had constant little talks, too, out of doors or in the house; talks about the weather or the scenery, that are not

worth repeating here, and yet that revealed something of each to the other; showing some taste, some opinion, fancy, which more superficial listeners would not have discovered.

After dinner the ladies, as was their habit, laid down for an hour. Maude accompanied the gentlemen on their foray into a bit of woods at the back of the grounds.

Janet had left the room with the ladies, but she never indulged herself in any mere luxury of rest, and so, as the freedom of the house had been cordially extended her, both by her host and his housekeeper, she wandered out of one pleasant room into another, and, stopping at each window for the new view it afforded, she wandered down at last into the library.

The tone here was warmer and darker than in any of the other rooms, because the owner used it almost exclusively in the winter. Janet pleased her æsthetic tastes awhile in surveying all these things, and then her glance suddenly dropped on the table, and on the small, blue china mug that stood there on its pedestal of rare wood. She leaned forward with a low, passionate cry, she caught it up greedily, and turned it all around, and then covered it all over with such hungry kisses, as a mother might her child, lost and found; and sitting down by the table she broke into such a storm of sobs and tears, as had never in her life shaken the soul of Janet Strong. It seemed as though all the want and pain, the sense of home-loss and yearning, which her will had held down for years, and which of late had made themselves felt so keenly, broke through all barriers now.

A great flood of grief overwhelmed the girl's soul. She sat there by the library table, with the heavy sobs wrenching her, and through every gust of tears came the low, smothered wail, "Oh, mother! mother! mother!"

That little china mug was nothing uncommon. You would be very likely to find its mate in any small country crockery store on which you chanced. But Janet had never seen its pattern but once, and that was when she was a very little girl, not more than six, certainly. Her mother had brought her home a Christmas gift, the very counterpart of that. The only difference betwixt the two was that the white raised letters on the front of hers ran, "To my little daughter." How that long gone Christmas day came back to her—the very smile on her mother's face, too, as she held

up the little gift, and the way she trotted across the floor to receive it from her hands!

How prouder than any crowned queen she was all that day, going about with her mug, and how her mother's eyes followed her with the smile and the love in them! She remembered, too, what value she had set on the mug after her mother died, and how one of the children where she lived dragged it down from the top of the chest of drawers in her room, and broke it! She thought her heart was broken, too, that day.

The library door was ajar. As Janet sat there, somebody suddenly pushed it open. Mr. Whitney had returned from the woods, for a moment, on some errand, and caught sight of the small figure before his table, shaking to and fro, and he heard the heavy, passionate sobs, and the moaning cry. Surprise, alarm, pity, held the man immovable as stone, saving once or twice when he started forward with a quick impulse to the help of his guest, and then the thought that her grief was one on which he had no right to intrude, drew him back.

So he stood there watching his guest, until at last he could bear it no longer; he closed the door softly, held brief counsel with his own thoughts, and then went—what else could the man do?—in search of Mrs. Powell.

"My child, what is the matter?"

A gentle hand was laid on the girl's shoulder, and starting up, Janet met the faded, motherly face of the housekeeper. Of all others, it was the right one at that moment. It drew out from her heart just then some words which the sight of no other face could have done.

"It is like the cup my mother gave me; my mother, who died when I was a little child, and left me all alone in the world!"

These words went to the tenderest places in the heart of Mrs. Powell. Little voices, silent now, had once called her "mother." The tears choked her eyes; she sat down by Janet, she took the sobbing girl's hands into her own soft, warm ones, and stroked them. She did not say one word though. I think Janet's mother might have done just so. And Janet laid her head on the old woman's shoulder, and cried there softly with a new sense of comfort.

And when at last her tears were still, she found herself

telling this soft-hearted, motherly woman a little or a good deal as it happened, before she got through, of the story of her life, of her orphaned childhood, her lonely, struggling girlhood; not going, of course, into the details of these—not so much as hinting at that one peril which had beset her—but still saying enough for her pitying, wondering listener to supply out of her own sympathy and experience whatsoever was wanting.

And all through the story, and even when it was done, Mrs. Powell did not say very much, although for years her emotions had not been so keenly awakened. But there was no need of words; Janet knew all that kindly old heart felt—the heart of a woman that seemed like her mother's—as she sat there stroking her fingers; not a strong, wise, cultivated woman—Janet's mother had been nothing of this—but a good, true, loving one; and the girl fairly clung to her in the sudden childishness of heart and soul which had come over her.

And when Mrs. Powell found plenty of words, it was not of Janet that she spoke. Somehow she found herself talking of the china mug and of its owner, and how it came into his hands; and Janet was listening, and lo! all thought of herself was merged in Mrs. Powell's story.

Bryant Whitney was the old lady's idol. No living person was so intimate with his whole life as she was. She had stood with him over the death-bed of every one of his household, and in its darkest hours she had been its helpful and steadfast friend.

Mrs. Powell had seen better days, and during the first years of their adversity she had been able to lighten in a thousand kindly ways the burdens which pressed heavily on the Whitneys. Death and wrong, from which there was no redress, robbed her in a large measure of the power to do this, not long before the necessity for it was past. Bryant Whitney was a man who never forgot a service rendered to his, and in Mrs. Powell's eyes, although not in his own, he had paid her tenfold for all she had ever done for his family. She was a discreet woman, and did not confide her knowledge of him to others; but to-day she was drawn out of her usual reticence on this subject, and once launched on the theme, she did not know where to stop. So she told Janet the story of Bryant Whitney's boyhood, of its stark poverty, of its long struggles, of the brave heart and the

generous purposes that never failed him, until at last the reward that always comes to such souls came to him.

But death came too, blighting one and another of the household, until at last only little Trot remained. How clearly Janet seemed to see her, with her young, sweet face, and the curls about it! And when it was laid away under the grass from Bryant Whitney, the last of his household, how Janet cried for him as she had not cried since that day when they laid away Evelyn's little baby beneath the horse-chestnuts! Oh! she knew, as nobody else could, what that feeling was—all alone in the world! And there began to grow up in her soul a great reverence for this man, such as she had never felt for one before; he began to seem to her the incarnation of all those strong and noble, those tender and generous qualities, which formed her ideal of manhood.

Mrs. Powell could have talked betwixt the tears which every little while choked her; Janet could have listened all night; but after awhile they heard voices in the hall—the ladies had arisen. It was time for Janet to be gone.

Mrs. Powell showed her a passage, through which she could make her escape to the room which had been assigned her for that day. The housekeeper did not, however, leave the library. She knew of a dead certainty that Mr. Whitney would hurry to her the very first moment that he could excuse himself from his guests.

She did not wait long. Bryant Whitney came in with a face full of eager solicitude, and took a seat by her side. His first question went straight to the point:

"My dear friend, have you found out what was the matter?"

Mrs. Powell was a woman of delicate scruples, but it never once entered her mind that she was betraying Janet's confidence, so she told Bryant Whitney from beginning to end all she had learned that afternoon.

Her auditor listened silently. He always did when others talked of their griefs, unless helpful words were needed. But how the story of that little, lonely, orphan girlhood touched and harrowed this man's soul!

The battle had been hard enough for him, with his stout muscles and young strength. What must it have been for this frail, delicate, shrinking girl? The very thought made him shudder. For Bryant Whitney knew well enough what a fear-

ful and terrible thing it is for a woman to be alone in the world; for an innocent, pure-hearted girl to have no father nor brother to protect her by the might of his love and the strength of his arm. He knew what wolves there are lying in wait to devour; he knew what advantage men calling themselves honorable, will take of woman's weakness and helplessness, what pittances they will pay her for her toil, what wrong they will do to her need.

And how had she fought her way through it all, and stood where she now did, this fair, sweet girl-woman! What would little Trot have done in her place?

He took up the little china mug; his eyes swam in thick tears; but just then he was thinking, not of his dead sister, but of Janet's mother.

When Janet and her host met again, neither suspected what new knowledge and feeling were in the heart of the other. All traces of the storm which had recently passed over her soul had vanished from the girl's face, but they had left some new light and feeling there, which, searching for, Bryant Whitney's eyes found out when no other's did.

And looking up, Janet found too, more than once, those grave, kindly eyes upon her face. How pitiful they seemed! It did not surprise her after what she had heard. She thought they looked upon all the world with just that look. But Janet was mistaken here.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

THE gentlemen got on admirably together. Their talk, of course, took that general drift which the day and the times indicated, making a gradual transition from agriculture to politics. It was more than two years before the war, and no faint rumor of the rising storm startled as yet the ears of Northern men, and so, after dwelling for awhile on the political aspects, and fair promise of their own country, the talk widened to include nationalities less blessed than their own—to the old despotisms which held down with the strong arm, and by the might of dungeon and bayonet, the young liberties which were struggling for birth and life in their midst—the old traditions and aristocracies and powers of evil, for whom, sooner or later, the hour of reckoning must surely come.

And so from France and the silent man who sits on its throne, and who seems in some sense to hold the fate of all Europe, and who is himself held of the God who is not in all his counsels, their talk went to Italy, whose day of national life, with all its wonderful promise, was in its dawn; and to crushed Hungary and dismembered Poland, to Russia, sitting in power amid her eternal snows, and Austria, in her haughty strength; and they never dreamed, sitting in peace, as we all did, that time, around the pleasant supper-table, that the day of the Lord was drawing near for their own land, and that the time of her long and awful struggle with the powers of darkness was at hand. During supper the gentlemen had had the talk mostly to themselves, but when they returned to the parlor, it took a lighter tone.

Mrs. Humphreys had been in one of her bright moods, a little toned down by the atmosphere around her, still there was a good deal of pretty audacity in her face, as she took a seat in front of her host and commenced :

“Mr. Whitney, I have a question to ask you—may I?”

“*Evelyn, my daughter!*” said her mother, in mild objurgation, having a suspicion of what was coming.

The faint caution was, however, entirely lost on the lady. She poised her head defiantly:

"Now don't, please, mamma. You know I am always privileged to say whatever I like."

"You mean, my dear, you always take the privilege," interposed her husband.

Mr. Whitney looked at the lady with an amused smile:

"I have no gift of gallantry, Mrs. Humphreys, in speech or action," he said, "but I have always been happy to hear or answer any question, which any lady might honor me with asking."

"Don't say you have no 'gift of gallantry,' after that speech, Mr. Whitney. But you will promise me further that you will not be offended, no matter how intrusive my question may seem?"

"Oh, you may depend upon my good nature to any degree," with a twinkle of mirth in those pleasant eyes of his.

"And lastly, you will give me a categorical answer?"

"If I can. If the nature of the question preclude this, you will promise, my dear Mrs. Humphreys, in your turn not to take offense?"

The little party was now closely grouped together around the talkers, and listening with various amused expressions.

"Of course I promise. This is my question, which I presume no woman ever had courage to ask to your face before, often as she might do it at your back—'What is the reason you are not a married man?'"

Bryant Whitney leaned back in his chair and laughed such a hearty, enjoyable laugh, that it was evident the question touched on no secret pain nor memory with him. At last he spoke, and now with a little gravity half concealed in his smile:

"It would quite tire your patience to hear all the reasons which make me an old bachelor, and besides they would only be interesting to the woman I may marry."

The lady shrugged her shoulders dubiously. But she was not to be put off in this way.

"Then your wife has got to tell me what you will not. I shall make it a point to ask her."

"I shall raise no objections to any confidence that mythical lady may repose in you;" and at this point the speaker was

suddenly summoned away, and the broken thread was not resumed on his return.

After awhile they all moved off to the library to see the pictures. Janet slipped away to the table, thinking every one quite too much absorbed to notice her movements, and the little mug in the center had an attraction for her, to which the paintings were quite subordinate.

In a few minutes Mr. Whitney came to her side, and startled her back to the present with his remark—"After all, that is the best thing here."

Janet's eyes shone up to him through their tears. He must know then that she had learned the history of the little mug! And on this thought came another. Had Mrs. Powell told him what had transpired in the library? Janet asked the question in the swift agitation of her face, as she lifted it to Bryant Whitney's. Her eyes met his, full of grave sympathy and pity. She saw at once that he knew. But somehow with the conviction her confusion all passed away. She could not be troubled. It seemed that out of his own sorrow he penetrated right into the secret place of her desolation and grief. In a moment he spoke:

"If you were to take that little mug in your hand, and stand just as you do now, I could almost fancy little Trot was by my side again."

"You would! Am I like her in the least?" asked Janet, not quite certain that his remark intended to convey this.

"More so, Miss Strong, than any face which I have seen since I covered hers up. Mrs. Powell and I were speaking of it."

It was pleasant to Janet to hear this, pleasanter than any other compliment he could have paid her. Perhaps her face told him so, with the little blush that flitted over it, for after looking at her a moment, he led her to an alcove on one side, over which trailed a heavy crimson damask curtain. He parted the folds and disclosed a portrait which hung there.

"That is little Trot," he said. "It was finished only a week ago."

It was a sweet face, just in its budding girlhood, in a cloud of chestnut hair veined with gold. The eyes were blue as morning mists, and full of light and hope, and yet one look-

ing long enough, found in their depths some lingering shadow from their childhood.

The rosy lips smiled, half in a dream it seemed. The picture was full of life, and yet it was a delicate, fragile life, that needed always loving shelter and care. The features had that fineness of mould which phrenologists say indicates delicacy of character.

Despite all its smiling bloom, too, there was some hint of latent spirit and force in the curve of the lips. When years should mature that young girl into womanhood, she would not lack strength and individuality of character.

Janet gazed on with a little indrawn breath. The picture was, in itself, a rare triumph of art.

"How beautiful it is!" she said at last, turning her face, glowing with delighted appreciation, to Bryant Whitney's. "One fancies faces like that sometimes, or sees them in dreams."

"It does not flatter my little Trot, I think," answered the gentleman, looking at the portrait with a kind of veiled fondness. "The fact may discover some weakness in me, but I have as yet kept it from all eyes save only Mrs. Powell's. One of these days I shall get over the desire of possessing it wholly myself, but you are the first guest to whom I have ever shown this face of my sister."

Janet fully appreciated the attention that singled her out, in so flattering a wise. She wanted to tell Mr. Whitney this, but she was not used to making pretty speeches. He must have probed down to her thought, for he laid his hand softly on hers, and said :

"I understand all that. You need not thank me." Then he asked, in a lighter tone, "Do you detect the resemblance of which I spoke?"

"Not if I searched for it all day. And had any other man told me it existed, I should never have believed he meant it."

"It is apparent enough to me; more striking, perhaps, in motion and expression, than when at rest. Little Trot's head was never still."

"I wish——," said Janet, and then, on second thought, she caught her breath and stopped.

"Go on," said Bryant Whitney, encouragingly.

"I was going to say, before I remembered that it was asking too much, I wish I could hear more about little Trot."

" You shall some time, when there is more space for it. I shall like to tell you, Miss Strong."

There were footsteps straying that way; Bryant Whitney caught the sound, and drew Janet out, and swiftly dropped the curtains of the alcove; and they confronted Mrs. Humphreys' face, and mischief lurked in it.

" Mayn't I come in there?" she said, with mock supplication.

" Not to-night, my dear madam. Forgive me. Some other time."

" How favored you are, Janet! I am actually jealous;" and she slipped her arm through Mr. Whitney's.

" I do wish, my dear, you'd take pity on my husband. He'll be inconsolable if you neglect him much longer."

Janet was so accustomed to talk of this kind, that as a general thing it had ceased to annoy her; so, with some playful answer, she slipped away and joined the little company at the table, who were occupied with some fine chromolithographs. Mrs. Humphreys' eyes followed her with a little softened expression:

" What a dear, quaint, blessed little girl she is!" she said.

" Is it Miss Strong upon whom you are bestowing those pretty adjectives?" asked her companion, whom, in certain moods, very little was apt to escape.

" Precisely, Mr. Whitney. You do not know how good and noble, how kind, and patient, and thoughtful Janet is. I don't see how we could live at all without her."

Something broke up the semi-confidential talk here, which Mr. Whitney would certainly have been glad to prolong. But it was not resumed, for Mr. Humphreys soon afterward discovered that it was two hours later than anybody suspected.

Even that pleasant day must come to an end at last, despite Mrs. Humphreys' wish that it might continue forever, and she now beset her host for a promise—and her solicitations were amply sustained by her husband—that Mr. Whitney would pass a few days with them at Woodleaf.

In vain the gentleman insisted that he never left home except on business, or for his annual summer trip. Mrs. Humphreys was so pertinacious that he was at last fairly coerced into giving his word that he would pass a day or two at Woodleaf during the autumn.

When the promise had been made, Mr. Whitney turned and looked at Janet, who had borne no part in the invitation; but if anybody had watched her eyes, which nobody happened to do at the time, one would have seen that she felt a keen interest in the result of Mrs. Humphreys' negotiations.

"I am glad you are coming, Mr. Whitney," she said, when he looked at her. There was not much in the words, certainly. The merest courtesy demanded them, and yet when Janet Strong was vitally glad of anything, she had a simple, straightforward fervency of expressing it, which we are apt to outgrow with our childhood.

"That was like little Trot—bless her!" thought Bryant Whitney.

"Janet, hasn't this been a happy day?" asked Mrs. Humphreys, as the carriage was starting away from the gate, where the host stood, watching the departure of his guests.

"Oh, yes, the happiest of my life!"

How intently Bryant Whitney listened for the answer, and how as he returned to the house, and long afterward, rang in his thoughts, like some silver bell, that voice, with its sweet, swift thrill of feeling along the words—"The happiest of my life!"

And of all the fair and stately women who had crossed the threshold of The Orchard, and brought to it their tributes of admiration and delight, that simple testimony of Janet Strong's was the sweetest in the memory of the owner.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

THREE or four days more had gone by. The visit in the city was drawing to a close, and Mrs. Humphreys was quite absorbed in farewell calls and shopping.

Not so with Janet. Her wardrobe was never the prime interest of her existence, although she had a most natural and womanly delight in graceful and pretty toilettes; but this morning no attractions of Stewart could draw her from home; no visions of dazzling silks, of fabrics fine and fair enough to be woven of morning dews or sunset clouds, beguiled her.

It was in vain Mrs. Humphreys persuaded—"But, Janet, you'll want to see the latest styles; and to-day is your last chance; we shan't be in town again before midwinter."

Janet shook her head. "My wardrobe must last for that time just as it is. I can't feel a particle of interest in the 'latest' styles, Mrs. Humphreys. The old ones will do for me."

Mrs. Humphreys had not lived all these years with Janet, without discovering that there was some little muscle of inflexibility knit up in her character, and that gentle and obliging as she was, her Yea and "Nay" possessed some quality of irrevocableness, which all natures do that have any strength.

And something in Janet's tone this morning made her feel that the decision was final; and so she had to content herself with carrying off her mother and Maude on this last shopping expedition.

Janet was once more left alone. Despite herself, some little pain or bitterness had lurked through her answer to Mrs. Humphreys. A chilling sense of despondency and hopelessness had been brooding over Janet during all this visit to New York. The clouds had lightened, it is true, on the day of her visit to Mr. Whitney's, but they had only settled down darker than ever since that time. The state of her own mind fairly frightened her. Sometimes she suffered almost beyond endurance. All the props of her faith

and courage failed her. It seemed that she was forgotten and forsaken, such an unutterable sense of loneliness and desolation possessed her. She bore up against the cold tide with all her strength of will; she would not let it overwhelm her. Ashamed of her own weakness, she carried the pleasant brightness of her face in and out of the family, and none of them guessed the slow pain at her heart.

Janet could not analyze her own feelings. She only knew that she was unutterably desolate and weary; that it seemed to her that she had no place in life, no claim on it, except that dreary one of existence, which God did not take away from her.

What a mockery it all seemed, when Mrs. Humphreys began to talk about "the latest styles!" As though she ought to have anything to do with them. The indifference and bitterness, the sense of utter worthlessness which at times possessed her, indicated itself in the reply: "The old ones will do for me." Janet did not know how natural in her case was the state of mind which bewildered and frightened her. A nature so essentially womanly as was this girl's, could not exist in her circumstances, without sooner or later revenging its needs by terrible suffering. All the sacred and tenderest instincts and sympathies of her being denied their proper development. No tie of family nor home existed for her. She was utterly alone in the world.

Her starved heart, her defrauded soul cried out against these hard facts of her lot. It seemed to Janet sometimes that positive misery would be better than this negative sort of existence. And this morning, when the bustling little party had vanished on their shopping expedition, the darkness came down and brooded on her soul heavier than before. It affected her physically. She suffocated for light and air, and the great tall stone houses seemed to close her in on every side.

An impulse seized her to get away from all this. She longed for a sight of the green country grass, and the great trees, with the quiver of winds among them. But where should she go alone? "Central Park," that land asleep and enchanted with its own beauty, glanced across her thoughts. But she would be sure to meet some of Mrs. Humphreys' fashionable friends there, among whom she was quite widely known by this time, and that would only necessitate explanations that must embarrass her. And

then there came out from the long road of eight years, the memory of the afternoon she had passed with Robert Crandall at Greenwood. She recalled the cool, shadowy quiet of that beautiful "city of the dead," just outside the city of the living. The thought moved her now. There was comparatively little danger of being recognized there. Janet was in that state of mind when some sort of action is imperative. Her resolve was suddenly taken. She drew a heavy veil over her straw hat, and started out alone, taking the first omnibus she met, and in little more than an hour she entered Greenwood.

It did her good, as Nature always does the sick heart that goes to her for help. The winds going to and fro, mowing the grass, the birds singing in the trees, the stillness and beauty all around her, softened the hard, half-desperate mood that had taken possession of her of late. Her soul did not cry out in her with that wild, half-defiant cry which it had in the great city yonder.

And yet, how much there was here to bring back that long-gone afternoon in the past!

How the thoughts and feelings of that time, with all the words which had been spoken, came back to her now! What a happy, innocent, foolish little thing she was then! How kind Robert Crandall was to her all that afternoon, with such a grave, tenderly, brotherly kindness!

No wonder that little desolate, lonely heart of hers opened right up and clung to him. How she fluttered about there in the green grass, the birds singing overhead not a whit gladder than she was!

Janet wandered on through the beautiful grounds, coming on many a spot which she remembered vividly, and stopping at each one with a half-tender, half-painful regard, much like a pilgrim visiting the shrines of his lost faith, her heart growing sadder and softer all the time.

At last she found a seat under some trees, aside from the broad thoroughfares, where there was little prospect of interruption. Her heart loosened itself in tears here—not a passionate storm of them, such as one would have expected, after the hard, dry mood which had been upon her for many days. The thought would come to her, put it away as she tried to, fearing it was sin, that her lot in life was bare and cruel beyond that of most women. All of them had somebody to love and care for them. Even those who slept all

about her, with still, white faces, and meekly folded hands, seemed more blessed than she did, who sat above them in the glad, warm sunshine, with the grass full of the stir and joy of life about her.

Loving eyes had wept bitter tears over them; loving hands had laid them down softly there, and gone away feeling that the world would never be so bright again, now they were no more of it; but what face of family or kin would be sadder when Janet's should be laid under its last roof of grass?

How her heart—the tender, woman's heart in her, clamored, and hungered, and sickened for something to love and cling to—her very own!

She thought of all the blessed homes throughout the land—throughout the world, where happy women sat, with husbands to love and cherish them, and dear little children to climb their knees, and she almost wondered that they did not die out of the fullness of their own bliss.

And she thought how she sat there, alone and desolate in the world, without one heart or one spot in all the earth in which she had any right of possession; and she wondered if it must always go on in just this way, carrying that cold ache in her heart down to the grave. And she looked off to the future, and the years stretched long and dreary before her, with no feet walking by her side, and no love to make the way easier—life always looks fearfully long to us when we are in any sorrow, out of which there seems no door but death. She wanted to put the burden by. It was too heavy for her faint soul. She wondered why she could not die now in her youth. There was nothing to live for in her case; and she threw aside her veil—there was no fear of recognition here; and the tears dripped, and dripped, large and slow, down her cheeks and on her hands, and Janet did not know, what the watching angels did, that if she had suffered less, she would have been less a woman.

And I think, oh, my reader, that just so far as you enter with vital sympathies into the deep places of this girl's pain, by just so far will your feeling be faithful to your womanhood. I know there were lots in life harder than hers. I know, too, that in pleasant places, beyond what she could have hoped or dreamed, "the lines had fallen" to her. None would have admitted it more readily and gratefully than Janet Strong herself; and yet this could in nowise lessen

the cry of the defrauded, most womanly nature which God had given her. And she sat there, and the winds laughed around, and the birds sang on in the trees, as though the dead never slept beneath them; and suddenly a small light buggy, with a single occupant, drove along the carriage road, beyond which Janet Strong was seated.

There was a little interval among the trees, through which, at one spot, the girl could be clearly seen from the road, if one happened to glance that way.

The carriage that passed by was not moving very rapidly; its occupant did happen to glance on his left; he saw Janet Strong sitting there, with her veil thrown back, and the slow tears dripping over her face. He had but a momentary glimpse, but it was enough. The face and figure stood out strong as sculpture in his thought. This man drove thoughtfully out of the grounds. Then he checked his horse, and sat still a moment, playing with the reins, as though a little doubtful in his own mind about some course of conduct.

When he reached a decision, he acted promptly. He sprang out, fastened his horse to the nearest post, and hastily returned by the very road he had come.

Janet Strong heard swift footsteps approaching her. She looked up. "Why, Mr. Whitney!" she faltered.

He held out his hand. "You will forgive me for coming back to find you? I had a glimpse of you sitting here all alone as I drove past a few moments ago, and somehow I did not like to leave you here. If I am intrusive, you have only to tell me, and I will go."

"Oh, no, you are not intrusive, Mr. Whitney; it was very thoughtful, very kind to come back." She said this with a little faint smile, in which was some pain. She did not suspect that her eyes told their own story of tears shed and unshed. The feelings which had mastered her for several hours had been too powerful to be "let go" even for this surprise, which she could not as yet tell whether was mostly pleasure or pain.

Then her gaze met his, full of a kindly, half-troubled solicitude, as far removed as possible from mere curiosity, although there was certainly an inquiry in it. It touched her.

"You must think it singular, perhaps highly improper in me to come out here all alone," she said half timidly, half apologetically.

"I think you will be safe from all annoyance here," he answered; "and for the singularity," his pleasant smile lightened down on her face here, "I do not doubt that your motive fully justifies that."

"I am not certain of it." She paused here. How could she unveil her inmost soul to this man? Yet she felt that she owed him some explanation for the singular position in which he had found her. It was a necessity of Janet's nature that if she said anything, it must be the truth, and so a part—it seemed to her a very shallow, and unsatisfactory part of the truth, one that must forever lower her in the esteem of her listener, came out.

"I was lonely and depressed this morning, and a great desire to get away from the city and out into the cool, still country, beyond the heat and noise, took possession of me; so I came out here, as the only place where I could find seclusion and comfort. It must all seem to you like a foolish whim, Mr. Whitney, one which I had better denied than indulged."

But Janet did not understand her listener. He saw far down through her words, into some of the aches and loneliness which they covered, and he felt a tender sympathy for this fair, sweet, lonely girl-woman, the deeper because he could not give it expression; but then Bryant Whitney's heart was always feeling pity ineffable for somebody. His answer was not at all what she expected.

"No, Miss Strong; I think your coming out here was just the opposite of a foolish whim, and the best thing probably that you could have done. Will you walk a little while with me?"

He gave her his arm. And—perhaps it was owing to her state of mind at that time—it seemed to Janet as she accepted it, that some new, blessed sense of protection encircled her. The pain passed slowly out of her heart as they walked on—strange enough, for several minutes, silently.

He spoke first. Janet forgot the need of words, in the pleasant feeling of rest and protection which now possessed her.

"You do not ask what brought me here this morning, Miss Strong?"

"No, but I will now, if you choose to tell me."

"It is my day here. Once a week I come out to visit my household in Greenwood," he said, gravely.

What could she answer him? Not a word now; but she looked up at him a moment, with those sweet blue eyes of hers thrilled with tears, and unconsciously her light hand pressed a little closer the strong arm on which she leaned.

"They lie only a little way off. Shall we go there?"

"If you will." And again they walked on silently.

In a few minutes they reached the burial lot, one of the choicest locations in Greenwood.

It was somewhat secluded, the ground sloping considerably, and commanding a most beautiful landscape from its greatest altitude. A high hedge, cultivated with the greatest care, encircled this spot, the dearest on earth to Bryant Whitney. Inside the rarest flowers bloomed in marvelous richness and profusion, and choice vines, carefully tended, trailed the glory of their blossoms over those three low roofs, beneath which slept the pride and the joy of the heart of Bryant Whitney.

The mother lay betwixt her children. Trot's grave was a little the smallest of the three. The head-stones were all simple, as beffited the taste of the man; the mother's a gray marble pyramid, while the sisters' were spotless white, each forming an arch.

A wreath of the water-lilies she loved best of all flowers in life, was exquisitely sculptured on the elder sister's head-stone, and in the midst of these, her name. Upon the younger one's was carved by the same artist-hand a couple of birds, and "Little Trot" was all the name which the tombstone held. It was enough. By that very name Bryant would know her in heaven. Underneath these were the words she had spoken to her brother a few days before her death, which was in early March—"I shall be better when the birds come!" She was better now.

And the money which had been expended on their burial place, would have saved the lives of all those who slept beneath! Bryant thought of this sometimes.

"They are all here," said he softly, as he led Janet in.

She looked around her. All the evidences of love and care which had been lavished here, moved Janet's soul to its center.

The thought of her own grave as she had seen it that morning, alone, neglected, uncared for, came back and fairly

overwhelmed her. She sank down by the grave, and sobbed out over it—"Happy little Trot! Happy little Trot!"

Strange words enough, but Bryant Whitney understood them. He knew that this living girl envied the dead one at her feet, because of the love which had followed her to the grave. He entered into the inward loneliness and desolation of Janet's heart; his whole soul seemed fairly melted with pity. He laid his hand so softly that it was almost a caress, on her shoulder. "Poor child!—poor child!" he said, as he could not have said it had he felt less at that moment.

The words and the tone reached Janet through her tears. She looked up, and she did not know what a grieved child's face her companion saw at that moment.

"Forgive me, Mr. Whitney, but I have been thinking how there is not in all the world, one of my own kin to come and plant a flower on my grave."

Again that soft hand on her shoulder—those words, with their ineffable pity shed all through them, reaching and comforting her grief as no other words in the world could—"Poor child!—poor child!" She knew then that he comprehended her sorrow. She had no reason to dread misapprehension. She leaned her head down and cried.

And what could Bryant Whitney do, sitting there with his hand on her shoulder, and longing to comfort her? Her grief, so sacred in his eyes, was yet beyond his reach. Something of deep tenderness, such as he had never felt for any woman, saving those who lay so still beneath, came over his soul. He longed to put his arms around that small, bowed figure, and tell her that he would be her friend—her brother; that he would shield and protect her as a man so might, from all that was lonely and bitter in the lot of a woman like her.

But Bryant Whitney's acts usually went beyond his words, and in this case the latter, out of the very fullness of his feelings, seemed to fail him utterly.

At last Janet looked up, with a half-deprecating, half-frightened glance.

"What must you think of me, Mr. Whitney?" she said, hardly conscious that she was putting her fear and doubt into expression.

"Nothing that need give you one moment's care, my dear child. I can enter into your feelings as perhaps few men

could, because I have been so utterly alone; only a woman's desolation is, from her very nature and circumstances, utterly beyond a man's. I had rather little Trot lay here than lived to fight the battle of a woman's life—alone."

Janet clasped her hand over her eyes. The tears fell softly through her fingers.

"Those were the very words my mother said an hour before she died," she whispered.

Again that soft hand on her shoulder, light but strong—that voice with its unutterable pity and tenderness:

"Poor child!—poor child!"

But the burden had fallen from Janet's soul now; it had floated away on the tide of her tears, or on Bryant Whitney's words. The sweet face has flushed into a new life and color for her weeping: and Mr. Whitney evinced a rare tact, and wisdom, when he led the conversation to those who slept before them, telling Janet stories of his own boyhood, opening one door after another, and giving her glimpses of that toilsome, straitened life, when the "wolf was at the door" and there was no arm but that boyish one to keep him back.

Certainly Bryant Whitney had no idea of disclosing a tithe of what he did that morning, but the face of his listener, lifted into such eager sympathy and interest, led him on and on into paths where his words had not wandered for years, and Janet forgot her own sorrow thinking of his and of the dead.

At last the striking of a distant clock made them both pause; and listen. It was long past mid-day. Janet's look of amazement was ludicrous. They had sat there more than three hours, and would only reach the city in time for dinner. Bryant Whitney plucked a spray of white moss rose-buds from Trot's grave, and gave it to Janet, and they went out from the burial place together.

"My carriage is just outside the grounds, Miss Strong, and I shall not ask your permission, I shall compel you to ride home with me for several reasons," said the gentleman, before they reached the gate, with that smile that beatified his face.

Janet was in no mood to rebel against any coercion, only she could not help thinking what Mrs. Humphreys would say if she should see them driving up together! But for all that, the ride home was a pleasant one—so pleasant that

Janet found herself wondering once or twice if she was the same being she had been four hours ago. All the stricture and pain was gone from her heart. \* At some jest of Mr. Whitney's—for the man had a relish of fun—her laugh run over; that swift, silvery laugh of hers that showed him, what after all he knew well enough before, the deep possibilities of enjoyment and happiness there were in her nature.

Before they reached home, however, Mr. Whitney said to his companion in a half-serious, half-joking tone :

"Now, my dear young lady, I am going to give you a little fatherly, or brotherly, or friendly advice. When next time there comes a storm from the eastward, shut the windows and bar the doors. Do not misapprehend me. It is not in your power to control wholly these times of darkness. They follow laws as well as the storms of our physical atmosphere."

"Do you think so, Mr. Whitney? I fancied all the time that the darkness was my fault, my sin. I never went through the like before. It seems to me now that I never shall again."

"I hope not, from my heart. But if you do, try to meet it with hope and courage—above all, my dear young lady, with *faith in God*. You know what that means."

"Yes, I know," said Janet, softly.

"And," he resumed, in a lighter tone, "I shall come to see in a little while how well you have observed my counsel. I have promised Mr. Humphreys that I will be at Woodleaf when the grapes are ripe."

"And that will be in three weeks." She did not know it, but there was a note of exultation along her words.

"So soon? I thought it was later than that."

"But you will come all the same?"

He smiled on her again.

"I always keep my promises, God willing."

They drew up now before Mr. Winchester's door.

"Good-by until I see you at Woodleaf again," was Mr. Whitney's parting salutation, as though the thought of their meeting was very pleasant to him.

The family had not returned. Janet felt quite relieved on receiving this answer to her first question when the door was opened. She could easily manage to answer any inquiries as to her manner of spending the day.

It was fortunate, however, that she reached home as she

did, for she had scarcely entered her own room when she heard Mrs. Humphreys' voice in the hall.

The last evening that they were to have in New York, Mark Ritter came around and passed an hour with Janet—a pleasant one to both of them. Just before he left, he handed her a small packet, saying :

"Mr. Whitney requested me to give you this if I could do it quite unobserved."

Bryant Whitney knew whom he could trust.

Late that night Janet tore away the wrappings in her own room, with a face whose wonder it was a pity the giver was not there to see. A small ebony case disclosed itself. She touched the spring, and there on its pillow of snowy velvet lay an oval-shaped brooch, set with pearls, plain, and yet of great value. In the center was a curl of bronze-brown hair, with tints of gold in it. Janet knew in a moment on whose head it had once waved. On the back of the pin was engraved "Little Trot." With a little stifled cry Janet bent over this gift, of greater intrinsic value than all which she possessed in the world. The pearls rayed their pure light about her, soft as the stars in the darkest night. And this was hers! She sat still there, away down into the midnight, gazing on the brooch. It was only the more sacred that no curious eyes must ever behold it, for in hers only it could be, what she did not doubt Bryant Whitney meant it, a gift from the dead to the living.

And with that feeling she locked it up in the ebony casket, chased with gold, and laid it under her pillow, and the next morning her first thought on awakening was to look for it, and lo! there it was, and not a dream.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

ONE evening, nearly three weeks after Janet's return home, she went out on the front veranda to view the sunset, which was that night a lake of fire, on either side of which was heaped great banks of cloud, brown and silver, with tints of gold.

There was a veiled content in Janet's face as she gazed, and wished for the thousandth time that she was a painter to transfer those colors to her canvas, and make them there an immortal joy and beauty.

These three weeks had been peaceful if not exactly happy ones. There had been no return of the dread and darkness in which her soul sat shivering before. A sort of trustful content seemed to environ her like an atmosphere, which she very wisely did not attempt to analyze, but took the good like a little child, "thanking God" and walking in the light.

And as she stood there, a swift, veiled figure came softly around the walk, and stopped a moment, looking at her, and smiling behind the veil. Then the figure sprang light and swift up the steps, and Janet neither saw nor heard, until a pair of arms grasped her.

"Oh! Wealthy Dana!"

They hung upon each other's necks like sisters. At last Wealthy disengaged herself, and with something betwixt a small sob and a laugh, she said :

"I always did enjoy surprises. It is either a weakness or a virtue of mine, I am not certain which. Are you glad to see me, my little friend and my dearest?"

"Glad!" said Janet, with eyes that eloquently prolonged her monosyllable. "But come right in; you must be very tired with your journey."

"No; I believe it is the thought of this moment which has kept off fatigue all day. Such a capital chance as you afforded me to steal on you unawares, for I caught a glimpse

of you through the trees as we drove up, and so managed accordingly."

But if Janet had not descried Wealthy, somebody else had, and heralded the young lady's arrival to her cousins, and in a moment they joined her with most demonstrative welcomes.

The two friends had small opportunity for private conversation that night; but it was singular that, when they were alone together, neither alluded to the subject which must have been uppermost in the minds of both. Their talk went briskly enough on all other topics—for a year, with its varied experiences, lay betwixt this meeting and their last one, but they mutually avoided the one matter that was of supremest interest to each.

Wealthy, with a natural delicacy, waited for her friend to introduce the subject, and for her life Janet could not speak. Once or twice she tried to, but words failed her. The silence must have gone on to this day, before she could have first named Robert Crandall to his betrothed.

The end of this strange reticence must come, however. One evening, after tea, the girls wandered down to a bit of an arbor in one corner of the grounds, near which a grape vine had taken root and twined, and rambled pretty much after its own will, forming a shady roof, and sweetening the air with the scent of its ripe clusters. They found some benches of cedar boughs, and a rustic table here, for the spot was a favorite resort of Mr. Humphreys, and they gathered the grapes with the glee of children, and devoured them for awhile, and then Wealthy crossed her arms on the low table, and looked at Janet a few moments intensely, but with an expression which no solitary adjective could define.

Janet had some prescience of what was coming. At that moment she would have given anything to avoid it.

"Natalie," said Wealthy at last, in a soft voice, hardly above a whisper, and yet there was a quiver in it.

"Well, Wealthy?"

"I think you are very strange, funny—what shall I call it, oh, Natalie?"

"Why, dear?"

"Because you have not asked me about——"

"About whom, Wealthy?" catching hold of the questions which her friend's answers suggested, in a blind sort of way, not knowing where they would lead her.

"You know well enough—about him."

The ice was broken now.

"I was waiting for you, Wealthy."

"That was just like you, you little, strange, shy, sensitive thing, and yet with that incomprehensible something knit up in you, that would take you through all things, to the scaffold, or the stake, if need were."

Janet knew what she was thinking of now. She knew, too, though the talk might wander into these side issues, it must come back to one topic at last; her next words brought it there now.

"And I am waiting to hear all that you are ready to tell me, my dear girl."

"Were you glad, Natalie, over what my letter told you?"

It was difficult to answer this question. But Janet's words, when they came, kept faith with herself.

"I shall be glad, Wealthy, according to your happiness."

Wealthy reached over and clasped Janet's hand:

"I do not doubt you there," she said. "But you are afraid for me now, because I came so near wrecking it once?"

"No, not that. The experience did not leave, as it found you. I never thought it singular that you were deceived then, but I believe, because of that very thing, you could discern sooner now, the soul of a really true, good man."

Wealthy repeated the words with a little tender exultation, under her breath, "A really true, good man!"

"You believe he is that?" asked Janet.

"I believe it; and I remember, too, with sorrow and shame, that I once said this to you, of that other."

And then Janet saw, with regret, that this memory must sometimes rankle in Wealthy's thoughts so long as she lived. It could not be otherwise, being the woman that she was.

"Do not let his shadow darken the present brightness, Wealthy. It belongs to a past, dead and buried. Tell me about—" in spite of herself, her voice would go no further.

"About Robert Crandall?" said Wealthy, softly.

"Yes, about him." How natural the name sounded!

Wealthy paused a moment, and then drew from her châtelaine, a locket which had been jealously hidden in some fold of her dress. She opened this and placed it in Janet's hand.

"That is he, to the very life," she said. "Nobody has ever seen it but ourselves, Natalie."

How little Wealthy suspected the feeling with which Janet bent over the picture! There he was—the one friend of her girlhood—the same bright, intelligent, manly face, more thoughtful, more mature, for it was now close upon its thirties, but his—Robert Crandall's, still.

She gazed and gazed, and Wealthy watched her with pleased eyes, in which a little pride mingled.

"Well," she said at last, "what do you think of him?"

"It is a fine face. I should like it anywhere. Most women, I suppose, would call it handsome."

"Most women do, Natalie. But it was not that won me. I had, like Hawthorne's Zenobia, gone mad once over manly beauty. It could never charm me again."

"What was it charmed you then, Wealthy?" still retaining the picture, and finding it hard to take her gaze from it.

"That is not the word which describes my feeling for Robert. I love him, Natalie," and she drew closer to her friend now, and her face kindled out of some natural embarrassment which had possessed it. "But it is not like that folly of my youth. The waters lie still and deep, like the river out there, instead of the torrent that plunges and roars a few miles beyond."

She paused here, and Janet read the face whose brown eyes smiled up, with the very smile that its owner had down on, her long ago, and at last she said:

"Tell me something about him, Wealthy."

It was a theme of all others, on which the young lady loved to dwell, with the one friend to whom she could lay bare her inmost heart; so she went on describing with the minuteness of loving observation, the manner and habits, and a thousand little individualities of speech and movement of her betrothed, and Janet listened and listened, and it fairly seemed that Robert Crandall stood once more before her. And once she broke in:

"And has he a little whim or habit, when anything pleases him, of tossing his fingers up through his hair, and laughing, a sort of quick, hearty, mellow little laugh that you cannot choose but join in?"

"Why, that's he exactly. But how in the world did you come to know about it?" answered Wealthy.

Janet looked aghast at her own forgetfulness; in a mo-

ment, however, she regained sufficient presence of mind to stammer out :

"Oh ! I fancied it might be so."

Wealthy, however, having no clew to her friend's manner, did not narrowly observe it.

"Natalie, I always thought there was something 'uncanny' about you. Your intuitions certainly fall little short of the miraculous. What does it mean ?"

Janet, however, thought that her intuitions this time were in nowise remarkable, and Wealthy went on :

"I have talked about you a great deal to Robert, Natalie."

"You have—you have, Wealthy ?" with a start.

"Why, yes ; there is nothing very singular, is there, that I should speak to him of the dearest friend I had in the world ?"

Janet was devoutly glad of that pretty whim of Wealthy's, which had christened her with another name, until she had come to ignore altogether her true one, which latter would doubtless have caught Robert Crandall's attention.

"What did he say about me ?" she asked, her heart going fast.

"Oh, he protested, among other things, that he certainly should be jealous of my little friend, who occupied territory in my affections that quite trespassed on his rights !"

"And how did you answer such pretty nonsense as that, oh, Wealthy ?"

"Not as it was spoken, for it opened the door for me to tell Robert something which I had been seeking to do for days, and the thought of which cost me a great many hours of humiliation and grief."

"What could that be ?"

"From beginning to end the story of my acquaintance and engagement with—that other. I could not have any disguises from the man whose wife I was to become, neither would I reflect afterward that there were passages in my life, that I should be ashamed, or afraid to have him know. So I told him the whole as I best could, shedding bitter tears through it all; but when it was done, Robert knew that it was to you, oh, Natalie Strong, and your love and fidelity, that he and I owe all the joy of our present, and the happiness of our future. I cannot tell you how kind, how tender *he was through it all*, and this took away the sting from my

confession, for I feared that afterward he would never respect me as he had before," said the proud girl with the tears in her eyes.

"My dear girl—as if that could make any difference!"

"I feared it, though. And of you he said, 'I shall never be jealous of Natalie again, remembering that I owe to her the best gift of my life. Give her my love, too, and tell her that I cheerfully resign to her a part of my rights. She has nobly earned a place in your heart which no other can ever hold—in mine, too.'"

"Did Robert Crandall say that?" asked Janet, and her eyes were luminous through their mist of tears.

"Yes, all that," answered Wealthy, and then she regarded her friend a moment, with a kind of uncertainty, or perplexity, as though she were making up her mind on some subject which cost her a little doubt.

She drew closer to Janet, at last, and her voice hardly lifted itself out of a whisper:

"At the close of my confession, Robert, in his turn, had something to tell me," she said. "Of course he believed I would never confide it to any mortal, but it seems to me that I shall do no harm in repeating all to you, Natalie, and then it will disclose Robert in his true light, and in one which no words of mine ever could, and with you, only, I am willing to share this secret."

What was coming? Janet's heart throbbed and throbbed. She could not find any words, and in default of these she drew her arm around Wealthy, and this mute caress invited her further disclosures.

"Robert told me," she continued, "that he would not be outdone in generous confession by me, although his involved humiliation and sin, which mine never did, for he held that the duty to lay bare all his past life to my knowledge, was as sacred on his side as on mine, so I should hear and judge him."

"Did he say that—Robert Crandall?" interrupted Janet, eagerly. "There are very few men who regard such a duty as reciprocal."

"I know that, but my Robert is like very few men," answered Wealthy, with a touch of her old stateliness, only it was softened by something in her face now.

"It seems that years ago, when Robert was quite young, while he was in college, he came across a little girl who lived

with his aunt—Mrs. Kenneth, a lady whom I have met several times with her daughters—as a kind of serving-maid and waitress. He never should," he said, "forget the first time he saw her. He called on his aunt one evening, and this little girl came to the door, and he supposed she was some young guest of his cousins, for there was nothing in her speech or manner which indicated her real position in his aunt's household.

"Such a little, shy, modest thing as she was, with the sweetest little apple blossom of a face, and a pair of blue eyes that looked at you with a kind of wistful earnestness, which as he described them, made me think of yours, Natalie, and a wonderful charm made up of grace and simplicity about everything she said and did. Robert and she got on marvelously well that evening, for the family was all out, and he was quite amazed when he discovered this pretty, lady-like girl was only his aunt's little maid. He was sorry for her, too, and the poor little thing was won at last into opening her heart to him, and no wonder. She was quite alone in the world, it seems, without family or friends of any kind; her father and mother, who were evidently respectable people, having died in her childhood, and she could only remember the latter.

"She had never been in service before, and of course her position in Mrs. Kenneth's household was most uncomfortable. She was above the kitchen, she was wholly unfitted for the parlor in the eyes of her mistress, who was a kindly sort of woman, but an extremely conventional one, a type of a certain class who have no wide range of sympathies.

"Robert's interest and pity were almost equally aroused. He made ardent professions of friendship for the girl, which of course she received without a question, and after that their acquaintance progressed swimmingly. He took her to various public resorts, but never to one where he should have been ashamed to accompany his own mother or sisters. They had surreptitious walks every few evenings; they called each other 'brother' and 'sister,' and the little soul clung to him, her only friend in all the world, as you or I would, Natalie, in such a strait as hers."

Janet bowed her head. It was growing dark in the shadow of the grape vine, and Wealthy could not see her face.

*"But it was a very perilous position, as we can see, for a*

young man like Robert to occupy toward a young girl, so far his inferior, so capable of being his equal. He said he would take blame, and sin, to his own soul. He did all that lay in his power, by word and act, to win the heart of this child, pure, and innocent, and trusting as a baby. It was no excuse that pity and sympathy for her loneliness grew into a feeling, the intensity of which he did not suspect at the time, nor that he never had the courage to look the end of all this fairly in the face, certainly not the baseness to plot her ruin. Still it was certain for all that, and he knew it, when he won from her at last a promise to leave Mrs. Kenneth's and trust herself to his care.

"The thing was all arranged. He had provided her with a situation as clerk in a confectionery store close to the college, and one which was, in every respect, far in advance of her position at Mrs. Kenneth's. All this time the acquaintance was carried on without a suspicion in the minds of Robert's relatives. The child herself hadn't the remotest fancy that there could be any wrong in it. He told me there was something in the look of those bright, innocent eyes, that would have blasted him if he had insinuated an impure thought in her soul. He never even so much as professed himself her lover. She was simply his little sister, and he, her friend, her brother, to whom she clung alone in all the world.

"It was arranged that the girl should leave Mrs. Kenneth's surreptitiously, and Robert was to meet her at some depot on the way, and accompany her to her new employer's; but when he suggested a secret flight from Mrs. Kenneth's, the girl's instincts recoiled; and so totally unsuspicious was she of any wrong behind all this, so absolute was her faith in Robert Crandall's truth and honor, that she insisted on going at once to Mrs. Kenneth, and acquainting her with the new situation which that lady's nephew had obtained for her, not dreaming there would be anything obnoxious in this, and he had to use all his eloquence, and every sophistry of which he was master, and only at last won her reluctant consent to his plan by appealing to her affection for him. So he returned to college. She was to follow in a few days. I stopped him right here, Natalie.

"'Oh, Robert,' I cried, grasping his arm, 'say it was not to any harm! You would not have done any wrong to this poor little innocent child?'

"And Robert answered me: 'Wealthy, as before God, I assure you, I laid no plans beyond placing her in this store, where I could see her from day to day, free from all espionage or molestation; but beyond that, I knew if she left the shelter of my aunt's roof, and trusted herself with me, that girl was lost.'"

A low, sharp groan slid from Janet Strong, as she sat so deep in the shadows that Wealthy could only see the gleam of her brown hair, as the young moon, newly risen, looked through the boughs, and touched it with a finger of light. And Wealthy drew a little closer to her friend:

"If you had seen the anguish of his remorse, Natalie," she said, deprecatingly, and almost as though part of the sin was hers, "you would have forgiven him, too. But she did not come—oh, thank God," with a burst of fervor, "she did not come! Instead, on the very day that he looked for her, there came a hasty letter, written at the very last moment—the angels must have taken her in charge, for her heart had failed her. She could not make up her mind to this step, without acquainting her mistress, although no suspicion of harm beyond the flight had yet crossed her mind.

"Robert took the next train to New York. He saw the girl that very evening, having first ascertained that his relatives would all be absent." And here Wealthy related all which had transpired during that last evening that Janet had passed with Robert Crandall. He had remembered all; so had his hearer; and Janet lived, as she listened, the whole harrowing scene over again, and when Wealthy paused at last, both of the girls were crying.

"He never saw her after that night," resumed the speaker, in a little while. "Two or three brief letters passed betwixt them, but when he returned home in vacation, he was greatly amazed to find that the little housemaid was gone, and his aunt did not know even her destination, as he discovered, on listening to a conversation which transpired betwixt her, and her eldest daughter, relating to the girl.

"Robert sought for her far and near, for he found that that little, fair face of hers had a hold on his heart, deeper than he imagined; and the thought rankled in his soul that he had driven her out into the world, for he knew well enough that it was fear of herself, and him, that had caused her to leave. *Mrs. Kenneth's*, making no sign.

"*In a year or two,*" he said, 'the better part of myself

had got the mastery over the fiend in me, so that my little friend might have trusted me to the ends of the earth. I should have done all that lay in my power to repair the wrong which I had attempted. I would have sent her to school, for her mind was always craving development in all forms of cultivation; and made of her, in short, what nature had before me, a lady.' For you must not fancy, Natalie, for a moment, though she was Mrs. Kenneth's servant, that she was at all like one."

"No, Wealthy, I shall not fancy it," said Janet, and again her friend could not see her face.

"And I said to him then: 'Ah, Robert, I see now how it would have all ended, had you come across the child. You would have only fallen deeper than ever in love, and after her education was completed, she would have been your wife. It is a pity such a romance was spoiled, only what would have become of me?'

"And he looked at me with a grave fondness in those beautiful eyes of his.

"'I will not deceive you, Wealthy. It is probable it would have ended as you say, for in all these years no woman, until I met you, however fair and accomplished, ever got into just such a tender place in my heart, as that little lost girl of mine. But you will not be jealous now?'

"'Oh, no, no! Ignoring myself altogether, I cannot help saying—if you had only found her, Robert!'

"'Ah, Wealthy, how many thousand times have I said that, pondering her after-fate. That little, sweet face of hers, driven out alone into the world by my act, where fiends lie in wait to devour on every side—that little, fair, innocent face was so likely to prove her greatest snare!'

"And I said to him: 'It would not, Robert. Be comforted! If this girl, hardly more than a child, had courage, and strength to fly from you, believing it was danger, and sin to stay, she must have gained wisdom, and moral power to repel evil in whatsoever guise it afterward beset her. Trust me here, speaking for her, out of my deeper knowledge of the heart of my own sex.'

"And Robert answered: 'It is very pleasant to hear you say this, my Wealthy; but you do not—pray God you never may know, as I do, what beasts there are calling themselves men, who go ravaging up and down the earth, seeking the pure and innocent to destroy them. It seems to me, some-

times, that if there is one sin greater than any other, one for which there shall be no pardon in this world, nor in the world to come, it must be that of the man's against whom shall rise up in judgment, at the last day, the soul of some lost woman.'

"And then, Natalie, I thought of Ralph Brainerd, and how if Robert had been as vile as he, this girl must surely have gone down with him to her death."

And here both the girls cried again, but Wealthy could not dream of all which lay beyond Janet's tears. And after awhile she continued :

"Robert told me that the thought of this girl had cast a shadow across his years, and sometimes, Natalie, when he has been walking the street at night, and heard the wild, desperate laugh of some woman lost to herself, and her God, he has stood still with a shudder, thinking of that little sweet-faced girl, and wondering whether she too, left all alone in the world, could have been beguiled into evil; and many times, for her sake, he has dropped money into hands that others would have scorned to touch, stopping, sometimes, to say to these poor lost creatures, words of pity and warning, and doing what he could to rescue them."

And here again they wept together, Janet Strong, and Wealthy Dana.

"And he told me, Natalie, that for years he had never laid down to sleep at night without praying God, were she among the living, to shield her from all harm, to raise up for her better, and truer friends than he had been, and to make pleasant and peaceful her dwelling-place, wherever that might be."

Wealthy was done now. She waited so long for Janet to speak, that she almost wondered.

"Wealthy, did you ask Robert Crandall the name of this girl?" There was something strained and strange in her voice.

"No; I intended to, but our conversation was interrupted, and it was one not easily renewed. But I shall on the first opportunity."

There was no help for it then. The truth could not be held back, and better come from her lips, than his.

"Wealthy," said Janet, and again her voice sounded strange to her friend, as they sat together in the darkness, "*if you had asked Robert Crandall, he would have told you that the name of this girl was—Janet Strong!*"

## CHAPTER XXX.

FOR several days which followed the strange disclosures under the old grape vine, Wealthy Dana seemed to be walking in a dream. The whole story had such an air of unreality and romance about it—it seemed so far removed from the atmosphere of her every-day life, that she could not grasp hold of the truth.

It was somewhat different with Janet. The truth had not burst upon her in a moment's revelation. Her life, too, had involved some strong contrasts, and singular crises, so that, although she was deeply impressed, and affected by all that her friend had revealed, it wore a less mysterious aspect to her own mind.

Wealthy Dana, pondering the matter by night, and by day, could think of little else. Sometimes she would sit still and regard Janet a long time with a feeling of interest, and wonder that fairly amounted to awe. She looked upon her as the guardian angel of her life, and when she reflected on Janet's childhood—on all she had passed through—when she saw the woman that she was now, it seemed to Wealthy Dana that her friend must be something more than mortal, and she certainly gave her credit for far greater virtues of head and heart, than she really possessed. She could not endure to be out of Janet's sight a moment, and was never weary of going over the history of her childhood, especially that episode of her girlhood, which had in some sense shaped and colored all her future.

Indeed there was some reason for Mrs. Humphreys' half playful, half petulant, "It's always 'Natalie, Natalie!' As if you and I were not of the slightest account, Guy! Some mystery is on hand, although I have not been able to penetrate it, being kept quite outside of Wealthy's confidence. Isn't it enough, Janet, that you have the larger half of my husband's affections, but you must entirely appropriate also *that of my remoter kin?*"

"Oh, Evelyn, be still, or tell the truth for once!" laughed

Wealthy, as they sat at noonday, round the table at their dessert of fruit.

"Well, then, will you attempt to deny, Guy Humphreys, that this most innocent 'Natalie' of Wealthy's has come quite as close to your affections, as was safe for your happiness, or mine?"

The gentleman made some laughing rejoinder, but he turned and looked at Janet, and thought that his little wife had come quite close to the truth. Janet read the thought in his eyes. She was not so much more, or less than woman as not to feel flattered in the knowledge. In all these years, she had in some sense maintained a constant struggle with herself, one that commenced that night, several years before, by the river. The regard of such a man as Guy Humphreys could not be otherwise than pleasant to a woman like Janet Strong, with his versatile powers, and his superiority of head and heart, to almost every one with whom she was brought in contact.

She had, too, what was more dangerous than all the rest, a certain sympathy with him in his marital grievances. In hours of weakness, and despondency, too, when the sense of her loneliness pressed heaviest upon her, her heart would turn with a kind of clinging gratitude to him.

Her keenest perceptions of right would be clouded. Vanity, and love of admiration would enter with soft insinuations at such times, that there was no need of holding this bridle on words and deeds, that she had a right to Guy Humphreys' interest, and brotherly regard; but, notwithstanding these things, conscience and principle had always held her firm in the path where alone was safety.

The words sounded pleasant and innocent, but they covered something beyond, deeper; Janet knew what.

Wealthy Dana had in her turn a great deal to tell, which her friend drank in greedily.

There was the whole story of the acquaintance, and courtship. It appeared that Robert Crandall's interest in the lady he had won, dated from their first meeting, although various circumstances had prevented the friendship from developing into any recognized feeling of a deeper character. His family, with whom Wealthy had been for years on terms of intimacy, was highly delighted with the betrothal. A woman of narrower compass, and coarser quality, would not have anticipated with feelings altogether pleasant the emotions of her

betrothed when the truth should be disclosed to him. But no such selfish feeling ever qualified Wealthy Dana's pleasure. The discovery of Janet's identity with the friend of Robert Crandall's youth, only served to strengthen a friendship which had become vital before.

"What will Robert say—how will he act, I wonder, when he comes to understand who my Natalie really is, and that it is to her he owes all the happiness of our future?"

They were sitting together in Janet's chamber one morning. Maude would be absorbed with her lessons, and Mrs. Humphreys was out riding with her husband, so they were secure from an interruption for an hour or two. Some feeling to which her friend could not penetrate came and went in Janet's face. At last she said:

"Wealthy, I want a promise from you now."

"What is it, my darling? To the half of my kingdom give it I thee."

"I had rather you would not discover me to Robert Crandall until after your marriage."

Wealthy lifted her hand in sudden deprecation. "Anything but that, Natalie. I have planned for months that you shall be my bridesmaid. In the wide world I will not have another. Robert knows that, too; and the ceremony is to be strictly private—only his family and mine present."

Janet remembered seeing the young gentleman's sisters once or twice, on their visit to Mrs. Kenneth's, but it was not probable that they would recognize in the most honored and highly-cherished friend of their future sister-in-law, the former serving-girl of their aunt; but for all this, Janet could not overcome her reluctance to the part which had been assigned her at Wealthy's wedding, but the latter bore down bravely with argument, and entreaty, against all objections, and at last Janet was obliged to submit, having extorted in return a promise from Wealthy that she would not discover her immediately to Robert Crandall.

"I think, Natalie," continued Wealthy, at last, changing the topic,—and she stroked the little hand, which, with the gleam of its solitary emerald, lay on the table, "that you have some better right, some deeper claim on Robert than I have. I am not willing to give him up—even for your sake, *I cannot make this sacrifice*; and yet that is the only way

the romance should end. If it was all in a novel, now, instead of actual life, I should certainly fall into the arms of some kindly death, and then you and Robert would be left, as you ought, to each other."

She spoke playfully, but there were tears in her eyes.

Janet drew her friend swiftly toward her. "Do not talk like that if you love me. Oh, Wealthy, I am glad in my heart; I bless God that it is as it is."

This was certainly the truth, but not all of it. Old memories, and old associations had been powerfully revived in Janet's heart, and those which could not but be in one sense painful and dangerous. It must be remembered that Robert Crandall had been the only love of Janet's youth. No man had ever supplanted him in her affections, although he had faded quite out of her life.

But it was not quite best for Janet's peace that the old scenes, and the old love should be recalled now, when he belonged to another.

Perhaps it was as well, however, that this thought never occurred to Wealthy Dana, and Janet hid any aching in her own heart too deep for her friend to discern it.

"What a secret we three shall always carry in our own souls, Natalie! How closely it will bind us together through life! And yet—I forgot—one other knows it partly."

"Who is that?" asked Janet, quickly.

"A friend and client of Robert's. The one man whom he told me he regarded above all others, and who has had the greatest influence on his life—a man whose tender reverence for womanhood has made Robert come to invest her with a new sacredness and honor; and to this friend, in some hour of intimate revelation, of contrition and remorse, too, he told your story and his; and he told me, too, that the wrong he was tempted to do, never looked to him half so black as when he laid it before this, his best friend, who he knew would judge him as an angel would—just as pityingly and as truly."

"Do you know the name of this friend?" asked Janet, deeply affected.

"He told me a Mr. Bryant Whitney. He must be a wonderful man."

Janet fairly sprang from her chair—"Bryant Whitney! Bryant Whitney!" she said.

"Why, Janet, what is the matter? Do you know him?"

She sank back in her chair. Her face was very white. "Bryant Whitney! Bryant Whitney!" was all she answered.

It was some time before Wealthy, amazed, and curious, could get the truth out of her, but she did at last.

Janet related the story of her meeting with Mark Ritter on the steamer, which would not have escaped her memory so long, under less engrossing circumstances, and of the young clerk's introduction to his employer, in all of which there were sufficient reasons for Wealthy to be keenly interested. And then followed the day at "The Orchard," and all that had transpired there, and the visit at Greenwood, and the singular meeting at the cemetery, which to this day, nobody knew of, and Wealthy had her tribute of tears for the dead household, and especially for "little Trot."

At last Janet stopped, and looked at her friend.

"There is something beyond all this. Oh, Natalie, do not hold anything back from me!" pleaded Wealthy.

Janet rose up and went to the drawer. She took from it the ebony casket, and handing this to her friend, the pearls shot up their soft rays of light into the eyes of Wealthy Dana.

And after awhile Janet told her in what way this rare, and costly gift had come to her.

It was a long time before Wealthy returned it to her friend. When she did, some thought crossed with sudden light the gravity in the face with which she had listened. But as she looked at her friend, she saw that no faintest suspicion of what was in her own mind had ever entered into Janet's thought.

"Let it wait," she said to herself. "It shall take its own time and way; it needs no help from you, oh, Wealthy Dana."

It was not singular that in a day or two after this, in a talk which recalled the past, Janet made some inquiries concerning Louise Kenneth, the solitary member of Mrs. Kenneth's household on whom her memory had dwelt with any pleasure. She was greatly surprised, and shocked to learn that she had been wedded and buried within a year, the latter only a few months ago.

The natural delicacy of the young wife's constitution had developed itself at last in a decline, which proved rapid and fatal.

She had been Robert's favorite cousin, Wealthy said, and he had felt her death keenly. On his last visit, she had said to him: "Oh, Robert, I am not afraid to die, for I know that I am going to a Love deeper and wiser than all yours; only, I should be glad to know that I had done some real good in my life—to feel before I go down to my grave that somebody was really better and happier because I had lived!"

"Did she say that—did she say that?" burst out Janet's words and sobs together. "Oh, if I had only been there to say—'Behold, here am I! You have saved me!' I tell you, Wealthy, it was that girl's words of counsel, and warning, that first opened my eyes to the danger; it was the thought of these, following me by night, and by day, which, under God, gave me strength and courage to save myself."

And how many, like Louise Kenneth, have set out from the shores of this world for that other one, not knowing the good they have wrought!

## CHAPTER XXXI.

"I WISH that my eyes had never rested on Guy Humphreys; I believe that I hate that man, Janet!"

The day following her cousin's departure, which, as usual, had been compelled by circumstances entirely outside of her control, Mrs. Humphreys burst suddenly into the library, where Janet and her pupil sat by the great study table, entirely absorbed in some botanical specimens they had just brought from the woods.

"Oh, Mrs. Humphreys! do you know those are terrible words to speak of one's husband!" answered Janet's distressed voice, as the lady in her long riding habit, trailed across the room, and sank into a chair, her face white with the passion which possessed, for the time, the soul of Evelyn Humphreys.

"Why, aunty!" faltered Maude, in bewilderment and fright, her eyes going from one lady to the other.

"Run into the other room, Maude, and finish the specimens alone. Your aunt does not mean what she says, and you must forget it."

Something in Janet's manner held back the words which panted at Mrs. Humphreys' lips, until her niece closed the door, and then she hurled them with a fierce defiance at her hearer. "I do mean just what I said—neither more nor less, and I repeat it again."

"Not here—not in my presence! Oh, Mrs. Humphreys, I must not listen to such words!"

Half a command, half an entreaty, the voice made this speech.

Mrs. Humphreys was in that unreasonable, and tumultuous state, when one's temper is ready to explode with the faintest provocation.

In another mood she would not have conceived it possible to answer Janet, as she did in that one.

"I believe that this is my own room, Miss Janet, and I

am unable to perceive by what right, or authority, you attempt to control my speech in it!"

The quick quiver of blood in Janet's cheek showed her sense of all that was obnoxious, and insulting in this remark. Her lips parted to resent the words, and then there stole suddenly across her anger the passage which she had read in her Bible that morning—

"For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God!"

In a moment the tumult was hushed within her, and when she spoke again, her voice kept soft and steady along the words.

"What you say is quite true, Mrs. Humphreys, that you are mistress of every room in the house, while I am only of—myself. You will not deny my right there, when I assert it only in declining to listen to what my conviction assures me is wrong?"

The tones carried quite as much weight as the argument, and that was unanswerable.

Mrs. Humphreys would have rejoiced to find some weak point in it, as she turned it on all sides, but it baffled her. The lady's anger had by this time reached its climax. She burst into tears—the little, foolish, spoiled child, in whom, notwithstanding all these tempers and weaknesses, was so much that was generous, and lovable.

"I did not suppose that you, of all the world, would turn against me, Miss Janet!" she sobbed now, covering her defeat with true feminine skill.

Of course Janet could not be indignant with an accusation, which, after all, yielded so much, so she followed up her advantage by a judicious combination of sympathy, interest, and advice, until the lady's sobs grew intermittent, and she poured into Janet's ears the story of her wrongs.

The affair, of course, had its rise in some small difference of opinion betwixt Mr. Humphreys and his wife. Indeed, none of their marital grievances had any source deeper than this one, but the storms they engendered were not on this account less vehement. Out of her own mouth did Evelyn Humphreys condemn herself with any impartial auditor.

Guy had recently presented his wife with a Canadian pony, a small, brown, glossy creature, of whom its mistress was extravagantly fond, and never grew tired of being in the sad-

dle. A strain of one of the fore-feet had produced a slight lameness in the beautiful little quadruped, and, to his mistress's demonstrative regret, he had kept the stable for several days.

The coachman, whose judgment had been somewhat overruled by Mrs. Humphreys' persuasive remonstrances, had at last given his opinion that the animal was fit for service. Mr. Humphreys thought differently, and when the pony was led up to the gate, and his wife came down the steps in exuberant delight for a canter over the hills, he remonstrated with her in kindly, but serious fashion, on the imprudence of exposing the pony to any severe exercise.

As was to be expected, the little lady was wholly unreasonable. She scouted all her husband's fears; pronounced him a "hopeless old grandam;" and when he persisted in his opinions, she grew angry, he grew irritable.

He called her a silly, unreasonable child; she called him names of far greater scope and significance.

Guy Humphreys could be persistent, even obstinate, when he was driven too hardly, and the matter ended by his peremptorily ordering the groom to take the pony back to the stable, at which the lady's impotent rage had culminated in the manner described.

Janet was used to these little domestic tempests, but she had never known one so terrible as this with which Mrs. Humphreys had broken into the study that morning, and when its first violence had subsided, she was deeply grieved to find the lady so implacable. Evelyn still regarded her husband as the greater aggressor, and could not be induced to promise the slightest advance toward a reconciliation.

At last a new thought struck Janet. "Put on your riding-hat," she said, glancing at the small heap of velvet and plumes which had been tossed on the floor, "I will get my bonnet, and a walk will do us both good."

Mrs. Humphreys would certainly have preferred to remain at home that morning, and nurse her own grievances; but she felt that some concession was owed to Janet, for her generous treatment of a personal affront, so with a tolerable grace she complied with her friend's proposition. She followed her in listless silence, through the grounds and out into the lane, where the barberry bushes on either side seemed to quiver all over with red sparks of fire.

*It was a beautiful autumn morning. Mellow, lavish per-*

fumes filled the air with a rich intoxication. The earth lay smothered in rich, yellow sunshine.

Evelyn Humphreys had a nature which could not long resist influences like these, and in a short time she was smiling and talking at Janet's side, with the memory of her dis-appointment growing fainter every moment.

But the brightness fell suddenly away from her face and voice, for at the end of the lane which they were now drawing near, branched off a path that led directly to the spot where lay the sweetest joy, and the darkest grief of Evelyn Humphreys' life.

She drew back as they reached the intersection of this path with the lane, and darted a quick look of intelligence, and pain into her companion's face.

"Come with me," said Janet softly; and Mrs. Humphreys followed, not speaking a word, through the still, dark shadows of the cedars on either side, until they came out suddenly upon the sunny knoll of ground, on the southern slope of which, in its small cradle of earth, rocked only by the winds, sung over by the birds, and soft falling showers, lay the child of Guy and Evelyn Humphreys.

The grave was one glow of blossoms, and looked as though the earth had cast up a red and purple wave amid the grass, although little gray flames of frost had begun to creep through it.

The sight of that small grave always stirred to its depths the young mother's soul. She threw herself down on the grass,—"Oh, my baby—my poor, little, dead baby!" she sobbed and moaned with the sharpness of the first hour of bereavement again upon her.

"Say rather my baby in heaven," whispered Janet, her eyes glazed with tears.

"But I want him here, Janet—right here in my arms, against my heart, where the little, soft, golden head used to lie!" was sobbed back for answer.

"I know the whole world would not have held for him a place so warm and soft as that, only lying there the little baby would have been grieved to know—" Janet stopped here.

"Know what?" and Mrs. Humphreys lifted her tearful face.

"What you said of its father this morning. Oh, Mrs. Humphreys, I thought then it was well that the little baby was in heaven!"

Mrs. Humphreys bowed down her head very low on the grave. The words had gone home. "Oh, Janet, I have been very wicked!" Her sobs choked her here.

Afterward what Janet said, sitting by that low grave, only those two women will ever know; but when, an hour later, Evelyn Humphreys rose up, some new convictions had entered into, and taken possession of the deep places of her soul; and she had made some resolutions which have since developed her into a somewhat wiser, and better woman.

As they both came out of the lane, in thoughtful silence, they caught sight of Mr. Humphreys returning from the woods with his dog and his gun.

With her usual swift impulsiveness, whether for good or for evil, Evelyn ran and shouted after her husband. Janet saw him halt and pause for her, and she knew that the young wife's first words would be those of penitence, and reconciliation, and Guy Humphreys was not a man to let a woman, and that woman his wife, meet him more than half way in this.

They were too much absorbed to observe her for awhile, and so she took another road home—a longer one, but it held a thousand pleasant little surprises of scenery, and the girl's heart sang within her now, for she believed she had spoken some right words that morning—she prayed God to give them perennial vitality and influence.

She saw how, here and there among the low vines and creepers, the frosts had run, making tracks of gold and fire; but to-day the noon heats were like summer.

So she removed her bonnet and moved slowly on, a little fairer than usual, in her white dress and black silk apron, with the blue knot of ribbons at her throat.

She reached the side gate at last, and found Mr. Humphreys waiting for her.

"Ah, Janet, you are a good girl," he said, taking her hand and clasping it tight. "Evelyn has told me all, and the lesson was for me, as well as for her."

Janet felt that her time to speak had come now. "Then you will take it also, my dear sir? Remember the home where you found her, and where she had been the pet and idol from her birth, and be, as is the duty of your manhood, generous and pitiful to her faults and weaknesses."

"I have not always been this; I own it with sorrow and shame," answered Guy Humphreys.

At that moment the gardener approached them. "There is a gentleman at the house who has called to see you," he said to Mr. Humphreys.

They went up to the house together; Janet with her sunbonnet still in her hand.

The gentleman stood in the front hall, with his back toward her, gazing out of the window. He turned as they approached. Janet started and gazed. There stood Mr. Whitney, with his pleasant eyes smiling down upon her.

He came forward at once, offering his hand. "The grapes and I have kept our promise," he said.

Janet sprang toward him, something of a child still, for all her twenty-five years of womanhood, and the pleased surprise of her face said what her lips did—"Oh, Mr. Whitney, I am glad to welcome you to Woodleaf!"

Mr. Whitney's visit was limited to four days. There was little that transpired, in the early part of it at least, to write of; still, those days seemed to Janet Strong in some sense the richest, fragrancest of her life. To its latest hour her memory will go back, and wander under the arches of their hours, and linger among their little passages of pleasant events, that would have slipped out of anybody else's thought long ago, but never will out of hers—never.

The smiles brightening the eyes of Bryant Whitney, somewhat oftener than they did the lips beneath, though they were not wanting there, seemed to enter her like sunlight; there seemed through all her being some deep, silent rush of peace and joy.

Everything, too, was propitious at this time. The house at Woodleaf was very quiet, for all the summer guests had disappeared.

Then, the days—it seemed to Janet that just such ones had never smiled out of sky and earth before.

It was in October, and the year was pouring out on these days all the rich life at her heart, and the earth, and air, and sky over all, rioted in color and beauty. The soft winds were heavy with all dry, luscious scents; the trees broke into one vast fire of crimson, and yellow, and tawny bloom; flocks of pearly mists, spotted here and there with red, clung all over the hills; there were tints and glimmerings of color everywhere—in the golden-rod, that flamed its yellow torches by the low-stone walls—in the barberries, that lighted crim-

son tapers, thick as stars, along the branches, and over all things, small and great, the ripened year dashed its bounty of color and beauty. And so, the small family in the grand house at Woodleaf passed most of its time out of doors, looking into the face of the year, lustrous and inspired, like a dying saint's, feeding the souls of these people upon all the pomp, and luster that trailed before their eyes, and that so soon would have passed away forever.

And for Janet, her emotions seemed to run riot, like the year's colors. She was half-frightened at the spirit that had entered into her—a spirit of such childish activity and enjoyment that she almost dreaded every moment, whither it would carry her. It penetrated her face, even, and smoothed out all the womanly curves and lines, and made it seem like a little child's, with eyes running over with wistful gladness. She was no longer the grave, quiet, self-possessed little woman, that Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys mostly knew. She was chasing through the grass, and hiding in green hollows; she was actually climbing the fences, and jumping among the rocks with Maude, while Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys watched her with a pleased surprise, or joined in with boyish and girlish abandon, for there was something infectious in this mirth of Janet's.

It brought back to Bryant Whitney—the grave, wise, somewhat saddened man—the old relish and sparkle of his boyhood. It seemed to him that he could race and tumble about the fields, as he had done far off in her childhood with little Trot; and he used to watch the small figure, with the white dress, and the little brown sun-hat, that had a pretty trick of falling on one side, with the sweet face, that now fairly sparkled underneath—watch it, and wonder.

But Janet was not always gay. That face of hers wore oftenest the still gladness of the year, and after a bright little romp with Mrs. Humphreys and Maude, she would fall into a thoughtful silence, sitting down on some stone, or amid the grass, as the case might be, listening to the others, and not speaking, unless called on, for an hour.

Sometimes she would half rebuke herself for these high spirits, as she did one day, when Mrs. Humphreys turned suddenly upon her, after they had all been having a merry hour or two, gathering grapes, which the gentlemen had clambered up among the vines to pluck, and thrown down on the grass, until it was covered over in a purple cloud.

But Janet's glee had an effervescent quality, which gave it the keener relish for others; and now she sat under the trees among the others, demure as a kitten that has had its play out, absently pulling up the spires of grass, and listening to the talk, or her own thoughts.

Mrs. Humphreys' abrupt question regarding the nature of Janet's thoughts had to wait a moment for an answer; so did they all.

"I was thinking," she said, "and the thought was a rebuke to me—that it was too late for my first childhood, too early for my second; therefore I had no right to the part of either."

"Yes you have, you dear, conscientious little thing," subjoined Mrs. Humphreys, very positively, fanning herself with her husband's hat. "It's just like you for all the world, to have some scruples, even about your fun. I didn't know that you had so much in you. What would our Wealthy say to see this new phase of her dearest friend?"

"By-the-by, Whitney," Mr. Humphreys said, turning to his guest, "you seem to know everybody, or everybody does you; did you ever come across a young lawyer who calls himself Robert Crandall?"

"He is among my few intimate friends."

"I'm glad to hear that," said the gentleman, while his wife leaned forward, with a little cry of interest, and Janet listened in a silence that went no deeper than her face.

"Why are you glad of that, sir?" asked the guest.

"Because he is soon to take to wife Miss Wealthy Dana, our cousin, and something nearer than that."

"Is it possible? I shall take no ordinary interest in Robert Crandall's wife. Tell me something of her."

"Ask Miss Janet," interposed Mrs. Humphreys.

"That is it!" turning with a smile, on the young girl, who was still pulling the blades of grass. "She is your best friend; you shall speak her praises, Miss Janet."

"You have left me nothing to say, for you have comprehended all in that sentence—my best friend."

The gentlemen thought so, evidently. Mrs. Humphreys believed, however, that the words admitted exposition and enlargement, for she took up the subject, and devoted the next half hour to a description of Wealthy Dana, which embraced her physical, mental, and moral individuality, in that

picturesque, and laudatory fashion, for which Mrs. Humphreys was eminently fitted.

Certainly if the lady's cousin had been present, she must have buried her face in her hands for distressful shame at praise she would have thought so utterly undeserved, for at the bottom of Wealthy Dana's nature was a genuine humility, which grew upon her as her years did—as it does on all of us, who have a true ideal, and seek after it.

And when the lady had finished, she began with all a woman's eagerness to question Mr. Whitney respecting Robert Crandall.

The gentleman's opinion of his friend was given in a few short, terse sentences, in striking contrast with Mrs. Humphreys' ornate, prodigal ones.

"Robert Crandall has been my attorney for several years. Indeed, it was some legal business which first brought us in contact. I have absolute confidence in his honor, and integrity. He has a fine intellect, and is a brave, generous, and noble-hearted fellow.

"He has altered—grown much since first I knew him, in all that makes true manhood. I believe any woman may fearlessly commit the happiness of her life into his hands."

Janet had leaned forward, with flushes in her cheeks, listening to all this. It explained something, the mystery of which she had not solved until now. In all that Wealthy had told her of Robert Crandall, she had been conscious of some new element in the man, which she had never recognized in the youth. Kindly, generous, attractive, he had always been; but something higher than all these, something strong, steadfast, Christian-like, of which Wealthy spoke, was not in the old Robert Crandall of her acquaintance.

She understood what *that* meant now, and that it was owing to the influence, under God, of this strong, true friend —this wise, tender, helpful Christian man, that Robert Crandall's character had changed, ripened—that his views and purposes in life, all occupied a different and higher plane. All of this was in her thoughts when Mr. Whitney, suddenly turning, met her eyes.

He had surprised her on several occasions by the acuteness with which he penetrated her thoughts, and this time, his question came so near the truth, as to startle her out of all self-possession:

"Miss Strong, did you ever see this Robert Crandall?"

The flushes in her cheeks were flame. She caught her breath, and managed to stammer out, half coherently: "I am expecting—Wealthy has promised I shall see him before a great while."

Her embarrassment was apparent to all. Mrs. Humphreys looked surprised a moment, and then her face cleared up, and with a little tripping laugh, she said: "Now, you needn't blush over the fact that you are to be Wealthy's bridesmaid. She told me this the morning that she left, and I agreed with her, that the place of honor belonged of right to you, to whom she owes all the happiness of her life."

Mrs. Humphreys could never keep secrets. They had a fatal tendency to slip out in mysterious, half-clipped little sentences. This one certainly did not escape Mr. Whitney, and he had a way of putting this and that together, and getting marvelously near the truth.

And by some subtle association of ideas, all that Mark Ritter had told him of some wealthy, beautiful, and accomplished lady, whom Ralph Brainerd had well-nigh persuaded into a surreptitious marriage, now recurred to him, and that Janet had saved her friend from this union with the blackest of villains; Mr. Whitney was persuaded that this lady was Wealthy Dana.

His glance, as its light turned full on Janet, had something in it which she could not fathom. He had struck a vein of the truth, but that was not sufficient to account to himself for Janet's embarrassment at the name of Robert Crandall, and there was something lying behind this which Bryant Whitney felt that he could not probe.

The noon heats were over now, for even in October, these were almost oppressive. The golden light burnished the leaves of the great plum-tree, under which they all sat, "like a company of gipsies," as Mrs. Humphreys affirmed; only, "they all wanted the picturesque costumes and attitudes;" and now the lady took a sudden fancy for a stroll through some quiet wood-paths, and out to the turnpike, which strung along its gray thread some beautiful passages of scenery.

Some time during this afternoon it happened that Mr. Whitney and Janet lost themselves in one of these little vagrant foot-paths among the woods. This was the first time

they had been left alone together, and it only happened now because that the others were busy searching for sprays and sparks of colors, in lichens and mosses for Mrs. Humphreys' aquarium, which just now happened to be one of her fancies. They walked on together through the shadows, into which poured, wherever it found an aqueduct amid the trees, the mellow October light; they walked on, amid the still wood-balms afloat in the air, and the silence betwixt them grew to the space of five minutes. The gentleman broke it at last.

"What is it?" he said.

Janet looked up with startled eyes. They met his, full of kindly curiosity, a little amused, withal.

"You have something to say to me?" he added.

"Yes; but how did you suspect that?"

"I fancied so, and—perhaps grew a little impatient, waiting for the words."

"I was trying to thank you for that gift you sent me by Mark Ritter. I have also tried several times with my pen; but the words I would speak always failed me; and I waited for you to come; and I cannot find them any better now."

"Do not search for them any longer, my dear young lady. I think your silence would at times be more eloquent—therefore, more acceptable to me than words."

There was no room for more at any events, as that moment the rest of the party emerged from among the trees, flushed with a little search for its lost members, while Mrs. Humphreys went into raptures over the treasures which she had collected in the woods, and her husband looked at a little distance like a moving cloud of fire, so completely enveloped was he in flame of maple branches, in flickering lights of scarlet berries, in plumes of nodding ferns, and gray and purple grasses, while mottled vines and creepers threw out their glittering tongues and wove their tawny lengths all around him.

"Whew!" laughed Mr. Whitney, "you look like the High-Priest of October, dressed for sacrificial rites;" and he hastened to relieve him of a share of his burden.

"It's all my wife's doings," answered the gentleman, gladly yielding a part of his flaming robe to his companion. "These women will always beguile us into making fools of ourselves."

"Ah, Guy! you won't say that next winter!" answered

his wife, appropriating the wholesale slander on her sex, "when you see what a perpetual summer I shall make of the house. I shall varnish these leaves, and wreath the picture-frames, and dress the mantels,—in short, I'll have summer and bloom on the walls, no matter what is outside, of storm and snow."

So, laden with their forest trophies, they walked home, as the day drooped toward night, and the sunset swung open its gates of garnet, into a field of gold beyond. And just as they reached another gate, more substantial, being hewn of stone, Mrs. Humphreys drew up close to her guest, and said, in a half-coaxing undertone:

"I can't help thinking, Mr. Whitney—and you must forgive me for saying it—that I wish you were carrying home these boughs for some lady to weave in color and bloom on your own walls, too."

He smiled down on her—that grave smile, that was yet like a woman's for sweetness: "Thank you, my dear friend!" he said.

But something in his heart answered—"I wish I had!"

Mrs. Humphreys had no thought of Janet while she spoke. If Bryant Whitney had, he kept his own counsel.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

Mrs. HUMPHREYS desired to give herself with utter abandon to the luxury of these days, and would have preferred that all work and all study should wait on them; but Janet, though it cost her a struggle, judged wiser.

She would not intermit all of Mandé's lessons, or her own, and though she might lose some precious pictures, and phases of these days, she brought a keener relish into what remained, and entered deeper into their spirit.

So there were morning hours in which she taught and studied with her little pupil, spite of all Mrs. Humphreys' protestations, while the rest had rides and sails; for Mr. Whitney had allowed his visit so narrow a margin that it was necessary to make the most of the time.

Janet was astonished to find each day that she knew him better than before, although there was no great freedom of conversation betwixt them. That he was anything more than her friend, in some finer sense than the term ordinarily recognizes, and made this by some mutual sympathies, and sorrows, never crossed her thoughts. And it never entered the minds of either Mr. or Mrs. Humphreys, who were generally keen enough in all such matters. Nevertheless, Janet would have been quite amazed had she known that she was several times the subject of long conversations, during the mornings, when the others were abroad, and she remained quietly at home.

Mrs. Humphreys was always ready to talk about anything, and there were several attractive themes for enlargement in Janet herself, and in their first acquaintance. Mr. Whitney listened with the same apparent interest that he did to all his lady hostess's entertainment, and she had no suspicion that this theme quite absorbed in his own mind all the others.

Bryant Whitney came to know Janet a little better, through Mrs. Humphreys; and yet, how much better, after all, did he comprehend the real essence of this girl's nature, than

the friend under whose roof she had dwelt for so many years!

"There is something a little quaint and mysterious about her to this day," said Mrs. Humphreys, concluding some remarks on her governess. "I've always fancied she was a genius, although I don't know precisely in what direction."

That Janet Strong had no such appreciation of herself, was clearly proved by a little incident which occurred that very evening. Mr. Whitney had stepped to the drawing-room table, in search of some book or pamphlet. On one corner lay a square of thick paper, which he inadvertently brushed to the floor. He picked it up, and lo! the other side held a sketch, executed with a fine and dainty touch.

It was simply an old stone, half smothered in gray moss, with a tuft of brown bearded grass nodding on one side. Over the other, bare, and rough, and broken, was twined some wood-creeper—the fine-veined leaves, tawny and crimson, the twisted stem, and the red glitter of the bunches of berries, where a small robin had alighted, with a dash of hot crimson at its throat, was life to its finest detail. You may see its like by any country roadside, or in any fringe of woods to-day.

Mr. Whitney carried it to the window, and scrutinized it in the waning light. While he stood there, Janet suddenly entered the room. He turned and held it playfully before her.

"This is your work," he said.

Her swift deprecatory gesture acknowledged it.

"I thought I took it with me up stairs," with a glance, half regretful, half apologetic, at the square of pasteboard.

"I find taste, skill, and loving observation here, Miss Janet. You must have a gift in this direction!"

"You think so?" It was evident that the praise, which in this case must be sincere, surprised and pleased her. But the next moment she shook her head. "No," she said, somewhat mournfully, "I have no gift in any direction. I used to fancy, sometimes, that I felt in me the thrill of grand possibilities, that my nature too, would have its day of inflorescence. But all that is past now. I have grown humble, seeing that I never shall incarnate in any faint, imperfect form my ideals. Even that poor little picture fell so utterly below the archetype in my thoughts, that I would not choose but hide it.

*It is evident that nature never made a genius of me,*" blushing to find that she had talked so long of herself.

What Janet said of herself was probably true. She had no immortal gift of song, or pen, or pallet within her. She was thoroughly a woman, and you will not understand that I mean these gifts make one less so, only Janet Strong was a type of a certain kind—would God, they were more!—a rarely intelligent, serene, well-balanced woman.

Nature had certainly, in her case, done much; but few women owe to their own unaided efforts, what Janet Strong did to hers. And looking at her, Bryant Whitney thought that sweet, fine, womanly spirit of hers, with its deep enthusiasm, its responsive appreciations to all beauty and loveliness, whether of nature, or art, or religion, was just the one for a man to take unto his home, into his life, to gladden and enrich it, hour by hour, day by day, not only with the sweet grace of its presence, but the power and beauty of its woman's tenderness.

And as he looked at Janet there came across him a thought that here stood the woman who might be the complement of himself, the one little woman, whom of all the world he felt that he should love to take and hold forever in his own home, there "to love and cherish her." But he only answered to all that she said with :

"It is probably best as it is;" and she pondered these words, wondering whether they meant little or much.

After awhile he said to her :

"I want this for my own. Will you give it to me?" holding the little painting before her.

"Oh, it is not worth your taking, Mr. Whitney," she said, but her face showed her gratification.

"You will allow me to differ from you there," he answered simply, and kept it.

The last day of Mr. Whitney's visit to Woodleaf came much sooner than anybody desired; but business imperatively summoned him off. This last day was like the others, with, if possible, more prodigality of color, more glory of sunlight, more warmth and radiance everywhere. It seemed as though the year had held back all her richest jewels to string them along the thread of this week in October.

They had projected a ride down among the rocks, and *along the beach* for this afternoon, "keeping the heat of the wine for the last of the feast," as Mr. Humphreys told his

guest. But during the morning, a telegram from some friends of Mrs. Humphreys, who were to stop for an hour at a depot four miles from Woodleaf, made it necessary to relinquish the pet project of the afternoon.

It would not do to disappoint the old friends whom she had not met for years; but as Mrs. Humphreys was discussing the matter with her husband, Mr. Whitney came to her relief. He would carry Miss Strong over to the beach, and the rest of the party would join them there on their return, which would admit time for a ramble among the rocks, and a view of the tide coming in at sunset, which was to be the crowning glory of the scene. Mrs. Humphreys seized this proposition eagerly, and so it happened that Janet and Mr. Whitney rode down to the beach alone, and nobody thought anything about it.

Their road took them for several miles over the old turnpike, which stretched its fold of gray sand along the banks of the river, and coiled itself up among the hills, and made a gash right through the green heart of the meadows. The earth, the very air seemed steeped in the dry, warm sunshine. Sweet scents urged themselves along every breath of wind, and then there were masses of gorgeous color on every side; the year was pouring out all her hidden wealth on this her last high festival!

At last they turned among the pines, and here there was a change. The warm, moist breath of the sea dashed in their faces, into which penetrated the spicy flavor of the pines.

I think that half a dozen sentences would cover all our travelers said during this ride; but the silence meant more than words in their case. At last they came out from the pines on the open rocks. The carriage road ended here, and they alighted. At this point was a picture to feed one's eyes, and feast one's memory for a lifetime.

The beach lay at their feet like a vast serpent, drying its wet, and glittering scales in the sun; and slowly up it, step by step, came the long, slow swell of the returning tide, the dark-green line creeping each time a little farther up the curve of the beach. Beyond the water stretched a wall of dazzling pearl, until the sky met it. Here and there some schooner made a cloud of silver fleece in the distance; and the long green swell at their feet knit itself in places into a white tassel of foam, torn into shreds on the sands.

They found a seat at last among the dry rocks, just inside the shadow of the pines, in a hollow of the granite, over which a trumpet vine had flung a crimson mesh of leaves, that the wind, whenever it passed that way, caught and shook out into vivid flame.

They sat down here for the space of an hour, it may be, and beneath them the tide came in with its song of triumph to the shore; and beholding the pomp and majesty with which it rode up, as a monarch to his throne, this man and woman found, for awhile, small place for words.

But these had their time too; with a long, indrawn breath Janet brought her gaze in from the sea; the winds had stung lip and cheek into a bloom singular to them.

"On days like this," she said, "when the world is in such an ecstasy and inspiration of beauty, it seems that I never want to leave it. Simple living is joy enough."

"It is a beautiful world," answered Bryant Whitney, "to eyes that bring with it the power of seeing. Even its Creator said over it, in that first fair morning of its birth, that it was 'good.'"

"But that was before man walked upon it, and He repented making him," said Janet, with something between a smile and a sigh.

"That is true; and we looking on the world now, can never behold it, and not think of him who dwells here, and what shame and glory are alike in that thought!"

And after pausing silently a moment before much that these words suggested, Janet continued:

"I dread to think where these days stand, and how soon they must go down, with all their joy and beauty, into the chill and darkness beyond."

Bryant Whitney looked at the sweet face with his grave smile.

"I have had just such thoughts in autumns before, but I always consoled myself with remembering that the spring, with its glory of resurrection, lay beyond; but somehow that thought is not sufficient for me this year."

"Neither is it to me," answered Janet, with a flicker of trumpet leaves in her fingers. "The winter looks so cold and dreary, that I want to hold these days back, each one of which I expect will be the last."

"You have interpreted my own thought, Miss Janet. For

the first time in my life it seems to me that my home will be cheerless and silent to me next winter, lacking some warmth and light which I cannot bring it."

And as Bryant Whitney said this, a thought struck Janet, that The Orchard needed one thing—some woman of fine, noble, tender nature, to bring into it the gladness of her presence, the joy of her love. That was the light and warmth which would make summer there, of the winter that was coming. And how blessed such a woman would be, in the shelter of a home and heart like that of the noble, great-souled man who sat by her side!

Janet did not of course speak her thought, but it gave a certain tender softness to the fair face that sat there, half drooped forward beneath the gaze of Bryant Whitney. In a moment he spoke again:

"Miss Janet, I have a secret to tell you—one which has never crossed my lips. Will you hear it?"

"Oh, yes, very gladly," a little surprised.

"Within the last year, circumstances have brought me, at intervals, and for a few brief seasons, into the society of a woman, whom I hold in my thought as I never have any other. She is young as yourself, and I believe does not entertain the remotest suspicion that I hold her in any closer feeling than that of a friendship, rendered somewhat peculiar by mutual experiences. There has, indeed, been nothing in my bearing toward her to indicate this—at least to a woman of her nature, however one who knew me more intimately might interpret it.

"I will not describe this woman to you. I have grown in her absence, rather than in her presence, to know all that she is, to feel all that she might be to me, taken into my home, gathered into my heart, the one little woman who would be the complement of myself, to whom I could bring all the dreams of my boyhood, all the riper tenderness, and reverence of my manhood.

"But for me, I could never court a woman with sweet-phrases and pretty flatteries, as most of my sex do. I am simply a grave, plain, outspoken man, and yet I have grown of late to wish that this woman could know what I have told you, and wondering if you, of all the world, could help me in this thing?"

Janet was certainly taken by surprise. If it had been any other man, she would at first have had her little jests over

the whole matter, but Bryant Whitney always gave force and dignity to whatever he said; so, after a moment's reflection, she answered gravely as he:

"I am not certain that my counsel is wisest, but it seems to me, Mr. Whitney, that if she is the sort of woman I believe she must be, that your best plan is to say to her, frankly, just what you have to me."

"That is your advice, my little friend?"

"Yes; for what it is worth."

"Then here and now I will take it." He leaned down over her, and his heart throbbed into his words: "The woman of whom I have spoken—sits—*by my side!*"

Had all the waves of the sea fled away before her scared sight—had volleys of thunder rattled down from the blue sky over her head, Janet Strong could hardly have been more utterly overwhelmed. The absolute surprise was so great as to be a keen pain for mind and body. All color forsook her face, and she sat staring in white, pitiful bewilderment at Bryant Whitney. The man, too, was greatly shocked at the way she received his words.

"Janet, Janet, do not answer me with a face like that," he implored.

She put up her hands, in kind of terror and depreciation, and waved him back, while half coherently, and with a sort of dry sob her words burst out:

"No—no, it cannot be. I must be dreaming. There is no such great good in store for me. It would be more than I could bear. I should die of very joy! I, who have gone all through my life alone, with no arm to shelter, no heart to love me; I, who all my life long have been grieving for a home like other girls, like other women. Oh, poor heart, that has ached so long for somebody to care for it—somebody to lean on when tired and afraid, wake up out of this wild, foolish dream!"

"My darling! my darling!" said Bryant Whitney, that strong heart of his shaken to its center, with pain and tenderness, "it is no dream. It is the truth, as before God. Come—unto my home, into my heart. You shall never be alone again, my child."

And she felt his sheltering arms close about her,—felt his kisses on her cheeks. And at last he succeeded in making her believe him; but in a wild storm of passionate sobs the truth entered her soul. It seemed to Janet that all the grief

and loneliness, all the long misery of her life, were being wept away with those tears.

"To think," she sobbed, "that God had all this good in store for me, and has at last brought me here into such love, and blessing, and happiness!" Her tears choked her then.

And in that hour Bryant Whitney entered, as he had never done before, into the heart and nature of woman; and ever after he held both in new reverence and tenderness. And when at last he said, with a humility that was touching, "I was afraid, little Janet, that you could never love me," she drew close up to him, and leaned her wet cheek on his hand, and said, with a smile that will light Bryant Whitney through all the years of his life:

"I have been struggling for months not to!"

She was calmed at last. She could sit there on the rocks, and could have sat so forever, with the laugh of the tide slipping up between, as Bryant Whitney talked to her of the home that should be in a little while; and she listened as in some marvelous dream, while he drew pictures of her gliding in and out of the rooms, and up the wide staircases, and her sweet face shining at the head of his table, or sitting at his feet in the long winter evenings, with her little soft hand in his, while he read to her and the storms rattled outside. And once while she listened—it was so characteristic of her—she drew close to him and said:

"But it must not be altogether for ourselves, Bryant. The disappointed, the lonely, the down-trodden, the weary, among men and women, must come sometimes over our threshold, and find there for a little while the comfort and peace and dear delight of a home, and go out again better and stronger, blessing God and us for the rest."

His smile deepened on her with approval beyond any words; but he did not tell her then, what she afterward came to know, how many had gone out from the shelter of that roof having found rest, healing, salvation, for body and soul.

And in her turn, Janet had a secret to tell Bryant Whitney, which for the moment drove the blood on his heart. She had been silent a few moments, watching a flock of sea-gulls that made a glittering white curve near the shore and then darted out to sea, while Bryant Whitney was content to read that sweet, joyous face of hers—his face now. Suddenly she

brought her gaze in from the waters to his, with some startled thought in it.

"What is it?" he asked.

She mused a moment. "You remember the little girl whom Robert Crandall knew when he was at college, and whom—" Her words did not get outside of that.

"How did you know anything about that, Janet?"

She hid her face on his shoulder.

"*I was that little girl, Bryant.*"

He lifted her face up in a swift amazement; his own was white.

"Child, child, you do not mean what you say?"

She was crying now. For a moment a flash of fierce wrath swelled the soul of Bryant Whitney toward Robert Crandall. The wrong which he would have done to that sweet, guileless child, never came home to him as it did now. But he remembered his friend's sore repentance; and Bryant Whitney remembered too that as he had assured Robert Crandall of the greater forgiveness, he must not withhold the lesser.

But as Janet sat there on the rocks beside him in her sweet and noble womanhood, and he thought of all the snares which had beset her innocent girlhood, and how she had carried it stainless among all the pitfalls of her youth, his manhood did her new homage, and his soul took a new covenant on itself—although that was not needed—to guard her in all the years to come from every breath and wind of care or grief, as God should give him strength to do.

At last the sunset bloomed in the west, banks of carbuncle and garnet streaked with gold, while far up the beach, laughed and exulted the flood-tide. A shout from the rocks on their right floated up to them. They answered it, and in a few moments Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys scrambled up the rocks, having lost their way in the last place, and in the first been detained for nearly two hours at the depot by some accident on the train.

"What did you think had become of us?" cried Mrs. Humphreys.

The truth was, neither had once thought of their absence! And something in the faces of both Mr. Whitney and Janet set Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys, and even Maude, to wondering.

Before they reached home, Mr. Humphreys said, glancing at a tree :

"The wind has changed. There is a chill in the air. Our pleasant days are gone."

Bryant Whitney's glance met Janet's. They could hear this now without one pang of regret. The winter no longer wore any gloom or chill to them,—its face beamed out of the future warmer and brighter than any summer of their lives.

That same evening Mr. Whitney told Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys what had transpired that afternoon among the rocks by the shore.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

WEALTHY DANA had, as she said, "a virtue or a weakness for surprises." Janet's letter had apprised her friend of all that Bryant Whitney's visit had brought to her, and this was reason enough, apart from others of perhaps a more strictly personal nature, to give that independent young lady an intense curiosity to meet him.

One evening, just after dinner, after his return from Woodleaf, Bryant Whitney sat alone in his study, watching the red sheafs of flame as they burst out among the birch logs, for the man had a quaint liking, among other little odd fancies of his, for a wood fire in the autumn. And as he sat there a young lady was announced, a stranger, who desired to have a private interview with him.

"Just invite her to walk in here," answered the gentleman to his domestic, fancying that this must be some new appeal for charity of some sort, as the ear and the heart of the proprietor of "The Orchard" were ever open.

He was standing with his back to the fire when the young lady entered and threw aside her veil, disclosing the fine oval features, and the luminous brown eyes which fairly probed his face with their first glance.

The lady was evidently in considerable excitement. Indeed, she was as near losing her self-possession as one so well-bred would be likely to do.

"This is Mr. Whitney?" pausing a little in front of him, with a widening tinge in her cheeks.

"Yes; but you have me at advantage, ma'am," and he offered her a chair.

The lady acknowledged the courtesy, without accepting it, by a little wave of the hand.

"Before I disclose myself," she said, with that smile of hers which many men and women had said it was worth going far to see, "I must make sure that you are just the sort of man I take you to be—the man who will understand and

excuse me for this terrible breach of all conventional forms in coming here thus to see you without so much as a letter of introduction."

"So far, at least, you may make certain of me," answered Bryant Whitney, with a pleasant twinkle in those gray eyes of his.

She did not wait any longer. She put her little, soft, ungloved hand in his, in a way that was very attractive.

"That is enough! A month ago I was Janet Strong's dearest friend, and now I am—Wealthy Dana!"

His face was welcome enough then without his words, as he placed his left hand over the little one that lay in his right, although these latter were not wanting.

So they sat down together in the library before the fire that colored all the room with its rich maroon glow, and they talked to each other—this man and woman who had never seen each other before—as they could not to the friends whom they had known all their lives.

The talk concentrated soon on one topic of vital interest. Wealthy, of course, had it mostly to herself at first, but the way in which Bryant Whitney listened was more than most people's speech. Wealthy held nothing back. It was a sweet delight for the generous, grateful girl to tell this man all that her friend had done and suffered for her sake in the great crisis of her life. What a picture she drew of it all—the long, lonely ride through the midnight and the blinding storm, and the little, darkly-wrapped figure coming up through the snows in the twilight at Dayton, and how she had gone down and braved Ralph Brainerd to his face, when his betrothed had almost driven her from the house in her wild indignation and anguish!

And Bryant Whitney listened to all this with what feelings my reader can fancy; and Wealthy, with all her natural reticence, did not mind, not even when she broke down in the midst of her story and sobbed like a child.

"Oh, Mr. Whitney, you do not know half how good, how noble she has proved herself in more than one crisis of her life!" said Wealthy, remembering Janet and Robert Crandall, and thinking that she only of all the world knew that.

"Yes, I know, I know, my poor, little darling!" said Bryant Whitney, in a voice low from rapt tenderness, and speaking half to himself.

Wealthy looked up in a kind of wild dismay. Could it

be that Janet had told Bryant Whitney all which they only of the whole world knew?

"Yes," he said, reaching over and taking her hand, "I know all that too, my dear young lady."

A pang of shame bowed for the moment the proud head of Wealthy Dana. Was not the honor of Robert Crandall dearer to her than life?

"He has repented of all that in his heart," she murmured, humbly.

"I knew that long before you could, and we have all forgiven him, absolutely and forever," answered Bryant Whitney.

It was midnight before his guest left The Orchard, and before she did she said, looking up to him with her beautiful eyes aflame through tears:

"I am satisfied. There is no other man in the world but yourself to whom I could give her."

Afterward these two met frequently, for at this time, sorely against his will, Robert Crandall was absent from the city on imperative business.

It was all settled that the marriage should transpire early in November, and Bryant Whitney, having waited long and late for the lady of his love, was determined on installing her mistress of his home with the opening of the new year.

"Everything was ready and waiting for her at The Orchard," he said, "even to Mrs. Powell;" and the quiet, little wedding, best suited to the tastes of both, which was to transpire at Woodleaf, needed no elaborate preparation or parade of ceremony.

Mr. Whitney and Wealthy gave Janet no peace, until at last she yielded to their solicitations and came down to the city, early in December, accompanied by Mr. and Mrs. Humphreys, who having overcome their first reluctance at the thought of parting with Janet, rejoiced unselfishly in her good fortune.

Then there was another imperative reason for the visit. Simple as Janet's bridal wardrobe would be, it required some preparation, and Wealthy's and Mrs. Humphreys' taste was indispensable on this occasion.

Two days after Janet's arrival at Mr. Winchester's, Robert Crandall made his unexpected advent at the house, fairly overwhelming his betrothed, who had not in the least anticipated his visit.

Luckily Janet was out riding with Mr. Whitney that afternoon, so the denouement did not transpire at that time, but it could not now be delayed long, and was liable to occur at any moment. Wealthy Dana resolved to take the matter into her own hands. Making her escape from the parlor after a two hours' interview with her betrothed, she paced up and down the floor, for the space of fifteen minutes, and during that time she projected the first meeting of her lover and her friend, and afterward arranged all the programme, and executed the details with a skill and tact which did her great credit.

Robert Crandall had of course no intimation of all that had transpired in his absence; and great was his surprise when Wealthy, on his return, informed him that she had met his friend, Bryant Whitney, "that he had recently called at Mr. Winchester's to see a young lady, a friend of the family, who was visiting it at that time."

There was nothing very surprising in this. The young lawyer did not, to Wealthy's great relief, so much as inquire the name of the lady, but he was somewhat disappointed in finding that she had anticipated him in presenting his betrothed to Mr. Whitney, and very solicitous to know the impression which the friend he honored and loved above all other men, had made on her. Wealthy satisfied him on this point, and when she learned that Robert Crandall would not be able to see her again until the following evening, she remarked, with studied indifference, that she "believed Mr. Whitney had made an appointment to call at the same time."

And here the gentleman unconsciously assisted the lady in carrying out her programme, by informing her that he should see his friend during the following day, and they would probably accompany each other to Mr. Winchester's in the evening.

As Wealthy saw her lover depart, she felicitated herself on the fact that the family was absent, and nobody would suspect his presence at the house that day.

The first thing was to secure an interview with Bryant Whitney. At considerable pains Wealthy managed to do this, at the gentleman's office, early the following morning, and laid her romantic little programme before him.

He at first somewhat demurred, fearing the effect of so startling a denouement on Janet; but Wealthy had the "sweet, persuasive eloquence" of a woman, and at last she

beguiled this man, half against his better judgment, into active co-operation in the plan, and the last details were arranged before Wealthy left the office, in a state of high gratification, at the success of her negotiations.

It required the exercise of all her self-command for that day, to appear just her usual self, but, greatly to Wealthy's relief, the evening came at last without any suspicion on Janet's part.

Mr. and Mrs. Winchester had, with their son and daughter, an engagement at the opera. Wealthy managed to have an excuse for remaining at home that evening. The party had, however, hardly left the house, when the gentlemen presented themselves.

Wealthy contrived to waylay the servant, who was going up to Janet's room to announce the guests, and take the message herself:

"I learn, Natalie, that a gentleman accompanies Mr. Whitney whom I met this summer among the mountains. It appears that your friend knew him also, and they have called together. How prettily you are looking this evening, my dear!"

"I am glad of it," answered Janet, as she would not perhaps have done to one who understood her less than her friend, and the chief motive that made her gladness.

The first part of Wealthy's speech, delivered in tones of swift indifference, prevented her giving it a second thought, as she followed her friend down the winding stairs, absorbed in matters of a more personal nature.

She came into the parlor in her dress of some fine dark wool, while a crimson knot made a flash of color at her throat. She did not wear a single ornament, and the rich brown hair was combed away from her forehead in just the way that she had worn it when a child; and Janet Strong had one of those faces that keep its youth long.

Ten years had rolled over it since that night when it first stood at Mrs. Kenneth's door, in its girlish bloom, and blushed with shy sweetness beneath Robert Crandall's gaze; and looking at it now, with the glad brightness that made a glow finer than color all over it, this face of hers did not look much older.

Wealthy had purposely made the lights dim, but her love of "in-door twilights" was well known to all her friends.

Both of the gentlemen were engaged in examining some landscapes on the wall, and as the young ladies entered, both turned and approached them.

It happened that Bryant Whitney, who had been beguiled somewhat against his own judgment into taking his part in the programme, advanced first. He experienced a little uneasiness for fear of the effect of the denouement on Janet's nerves or feelings; still, he was as keenly interested in the matter as Wealthy herself. Mr. Crandall was partially behind, and Wealthy managed to keep him pretty well in the shadow, while she introduced "Mrs. Humphreys' friend," in so low a tone that neither party caught the name of the other.

Janet's glance, indeed, merely grazed the gentleman, as she bowed in response to Wealthy's introduction, and Mr. Whitney immediately seated her on one of the lounges, and established himself beside her, while Mr. Crandall did the same thing with Wealthy, on the other side of the room.

So each couple fell into conversation, although it cost Wealthy Dana an intense effort to maintain her self-control, with her heart at her throat. Janet was too much occupied with her companion—Robert Crandall was with his, to bestow a thought for the next five minutes on each other; but suddenly, at some speech of Mr. Whitney's, Janet's quick little laugh flickered out—the laugh that had some music in it that one, once having heard and loved, would be likely never to forget afterward.

And Robert Crandall stopped suddenly in the midst of his talk, and glanced toward the couple on the other lounge, and Wealthy saw that little silvery chime of a laugh had reached some echo in his memory.

"My friend Whitney seems on very intimate terms with that young lady; I did not hear her name, Wealthy?"

"The heat is almost suffocating here," exclaimed the young lady, springing up suddenly, and going to the other side of the room to close the register, and returning a moment later, with some important matter in hand, which absorbed her lover's attention for the next minute.

But the denouement could not long be delayed, although Wealthy began almost to dread the strong life and excitement that must come with it, much as she had enjoyed the *anticipation*. Suddenly, Janet's voice raised itself out of the low hum of talk which filled the stately parlors:

"I have made an engagement for you to-morrow, Wealthy."

"You have—what sort of one, dear?"

"Mr. Whitney invites us to go out to lunch at The Orchard, and I have said you will go with me."

Robert Crandall had leaned forward to listen. There was a breathless intentness in his face. He turned it, in a moment, half bewildered toward his companion. "Surely I have heard that voice before, Wealthy. Who is this young lady?"

The time had come now; concealment was no longer possible. Wealthy sprang up, determined to carry out to the letter her part of the programme, and touched with a shaking hand the "side-burner," and a strong light poured over the room.

Janet started, blinked her eyes, and looked. Robert Crandall's gaze and hers met in that moment. Her quick glance of doubt, bewilderment, went from one face to the other, and of a sudden the truth broke on her. Her face was very white, she half sprang from her seat; the old terror of that last night, on which she had wrung her inmost soul in parting with Robert Crandall, came back on Janet, and she turned to Bryant Whitney with a look of childlike fright and appeal, which moved him deeply.

"Do not be afraid, my darling," he said, and the words calmed her, and in a moment she stood there, still and reassured, to meet Robert Crandall.

As for him, the recognition was not quite so sudden, for previous facts had less prepared him for it; but he came forward with his gaze piercing her face through, and suddenly cried out:

"Is this—am I dreaming—Janet Strong?"

"Yes, it is I, Robert," faltered the girl.

"And, Robert, it is also that best friend to whom I owe all that you know—my Natalie!" said Wealthy.

"And more than that, Robert Crandall, it is the little girl who, within two months, God willing, has promised to be my wife!" added Bryant Whitney's voice, tender and solemn.

For the next half hour all which happened is beyond the reach of lip or pen—it will never be known to any in this world, save those four, and mayhap the listening angels. Of those men and women, there was no dry eye in the room during this time.

But at last Robert Crandall had come to understand it all, although it would take hours to tell by what steps the result had been achieved; but he knew that Mrs. Kenneth's little housemaid was now the gracious and accomplished woman before him—was the affianced bride of his noblest and dearest friend, capable of adorning in all respects the high position to which he would exalt her; and was, moreover, the idolized companion of his wife, the woman to whom she was bound by a debt of such unutterable magnitude! Was it singular that Robert Crandall could not keep his eyes off from Janet—that he watched every movement, listened to every word?

"It is Janet," he said to himself, "altered and improved with years and cultivation, but my little sister, Janet Strong, still!"

And he took her little warm hands in his, and in gratitude, and joy that filled him with unutterable humility, he said :

"Janet, for the wrong which once I was tempted to do, I have gone sorrowing for years—I have repented before God. Will you forgive me?"

"Now and forever, Robert."

"I have felt many times, Janet, that I would be willing to die, if I could hear you say those words, and now God has answered me in a way that I should not have dared to ask in my prayers, nor hoped in my thoughts!" And here they wept together, he and Janet Strong, and not they only.

When the first excitement was over, there was a story to be told—that of Janet's life from the day in which she left Mrs. Kenneth's. She took it up there, and carried it through to the time of her meeting with Wealthy Dana, although Robert Crandall's eager questions constantly broke into the thread of her narrative; and then Wealthy superseded her, and finished it, save a concluding chapter, which was Bryant Whitney's.

"But," he concluded, with a smile, "this evening's drama is due solely to Wealthy's genius. She conceived and executed the whole. I was rather a witness, than abettor in the matter."

"And I have kept the secret two months, Robert, and proved the old proverb, that my sex cannot keep one, a foul slander," added Wealthy, playfully.

"I will never allow it to pass unchallenged again," subjoined Robert Crandall.

But the talk soon gravitated back to seriousness.

"I thought, Whitney," said the young lawyer to his friend, "that I owed you, under God, whatsoever little good might be in me. But I take *this* gift from your hands, Janet," and he drew his arm around Wealthy. "Oh, how little could I dream through what paths God would bring us to this hour!"

"How little!" murmured Janet.

The evening was waxing late. They were in no mood to meet the people who would soon return from the opera, light and gay. This evening had touched on much that was vital to all of them. There was talk for the future, but that must wait until to-morrow at The Orchard. But before they separated that night, they all knelt down together, while Bryant Whitney gave praise and thanks to God, for the loving care which had been about all their lives, for the evil from which each one had been delivered, and for the happiness which had made each to feel and to say, that night, "It is enough, oh, God!"

And out of this hour, precious and blessed in some sense, beyond any hour of their lives, he made a new covenant for himself, and those who were with him, consecrating his service, his fortune, his life, to God and to man, and praying that in all things he might seek to know, and to do the will of Him whose he was, for time and eternity.

And they rose up from the solemn consecration of that prayer, while a peace, tender as brooding angels, seemed to hover about them; they rose up, each man and woman feeling that from that hour in some deeper sense than ever before—the world was changed to them, and they to the world.











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